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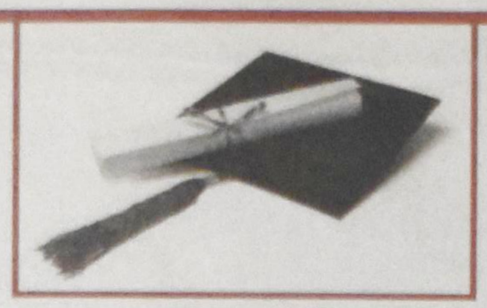

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A Reformed Biweekly | 65th Year of Publication | September 12, 2011 | NO. 2920

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CHRISTIAN COURIER

Ten years after 9/11, Middle East peace appears no closer

Mike Wevers

Some world events are so shocking that they lead us to remember where we were when they happened. The first such event in my lifetime was the assassination of President Kennedy, during my Grade five lunch hour at home. Kennedy's motorcade death and the subsequent public slaying of his accused assassin is often associated with a loss of innocence, not just for us as individuals as we watched those tragic events unfold on our living room televisions, but for post-World War II society as well.

Similarly, where we were and what we were doing on September 11, 2001 has been indelibly scorched in each of our time and place memories. Many of us woke to hear news that a plane had crashed into one of the World Trade Center towers, and then watched in horror as a second ripped into its twin. We became transfixed by news coverage at home and at work. We learned that attacks had also targeted the Pentagon in Washington DC. When United Airlines Flight 93 crashed killing all on board after passengers fought to take back control of the airplane, another uncertain target was not reached. If a general loss of innocence was the price of the Kennedy assassination, 9/11 and its 3,000 deaths exacted a more problematic price – the little trust we had in our Muslim brothers and sisters collapsed as rapidly as the twin towers in New York City.

The long-awaited 9/11 memorial, "Reflecting Absence," opens Sept. 12, 2011.

A way to remember

If you are reflecting on 9/11 events, you should visit the 9/11 Memorial website. It is focused on bringing the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center to homes in America, and to honour those who died. But it is also an educational resource to help users understand not only the events of that day, but some of the issues that gave rise to the horrible actions and their aftermath. The Middle East History and Security section includes the webcast series "Exploring 9/11, the World Before and After." In this series, Clifford Channin, Senior Program Advisor at the Museum, interviews academics and opinion leaders, many of whom have deep roots in the Middle East, including Prince El Hassan bin Talal, Prince of Jordan, a direct descendent of the country's ruling Hashemite family. The Prince reminds us "Islam is about the submission to the will of God, not secular power," which means, he says, for example, that "you don't take the law into your own hands and kill innocents."

The 9/11 Memorial website will also make you aware that in response to those tragic September events the United States military moved to strengthen its understanding of a new way of doing battle. They now had to consider the possibility that terror could come so effectively to the streets of America, delivered by a Muslim network, Al-Qaeda, headed by a Saudi national, Osama bin Laden. The Combating Terrorism Center at West Point Military Academy was established in 2003. As part of the "Exploring 9/11" series, Channin interviews Jarret Brachman, Director of Research at the Terrorism Center. In discussing the "war on terror," Brachman states, "as a nation we were thrust into a fight that we were not prepared intellectually for. We didn't understand the basic concepts, the language, and it's taking us some time to understand who it is we are fighting and who we are not fighting . . . we are illuminating the battlefield." But do we yet know whom we are truly fighting, other than loosely branded militant Muslim extremists?

Post-9/11 conflict

The Terrorism Center is now trying to develop a more strategic approach to combat terror than that which immediately followed 9/11. America's military might moved swiftly at the time, entering Afghanistan in October 2001 on the grounds that the Taliban in power in that country supported and protected Al-Qaeda. Within weeks, the Taliban were removed from power. Most Al-Qaeda elements moved to Pakistan, including, as it turns out, the leader. The U.S. was able to secure broad based support for its action in Afghanistan through the United Nations Security Council's sanctioned International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The ISAF includes Canada as an integral part of actions, although our military role winds down this year to be replaced by a focus on restructuring the country through 2014.

Following the early successes in Afghanistan, President George W. Bush sought international endorsement to broaden the conflict by entering Iraq on the grounds that the country's leadership was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Despite failing to obtain United Nations support to invade, the United States entered Iraq in March 2003. While the United Kingdom agreed to support the American-

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The 'Arab Spring' persists into fall

Dena Nicolai

CAIRO, Egypt – Summer drew to a close as countries around the Middle East marked the end of Ramadan on August 30, but the revolutionary uprisings dubbed the "Arab Spring" continue.

"I don't know if anything will truly improve in my lifetime," says Joey Luke, 22, sitting in a cafe in Cairo. "But if it changes for my children, it will be worth it."

In other parts of the Arab world, such as Yemen and Bahrain, the "spring" looks like it will extend long into fall and winter, as protesters continue with their demands for democracy. The beginning of the Libyan rebels' takeover (as of Aug. 22) of Tripoli seems like the end of Qaddafi's regime, but some still fear that

Tens of thousands of Libyans celebrate Tripoli's uprising.

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News

'Arab Spring' *continued*

the country will split along tribal lines. In Benghazi – the heartland of the rebels and a *de facto* capital – media and aid workers report that the Transitional National Council (TNC) is doing an impressive job of organizing and filling the social service gap left by the departure of Qaddafi's government. The TNC and its forces remain under intense scrutiny from media, NATO, and other outside observers, knowing that, like in Egypt, there is much work to be done.

As protestors take to the streets each Friday in Syria, its leaders repeatedly ignore international condemnation of the violence they are using against citizens. President Bashar al-Assad's forces have killed over 1,000 people across the country so far. In late August, Assad spoke on Syrian public television, stating that "there will be elections and a review of the constitution." He stressed Syrian sovereignty and, not unlike Mubarak in February, mentioned foreign plots to undermine the country.

Mark Smith, 28, (name changed to protect his identity) is an American who recently left Syria after three years of working there. He feels that no matter what Assad says, it is now too late. If the regime had kept its promises of reform, it could have been a light in the region, but Assad's failure and the continued killing of Syrian citizens means that things will get worse before they get better. "The protesters still remember Hama," says Smith, referring to the 1982 massacre of thousands of Syrians in that northern city by Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez (Bashar also crushed a revolt there a few weeks ago). "They won't forget. The internet age is also changing the way people think – they're learning more about what's happening in other countries and what is possible for their own country. You can't keep 20 million people under puppeteer rule forever," he adds.

Ex-President on trial

The benchmark of this Arab Spring may be the trial in Egypt of ex-President Hosni Mubarak. It's an inspiring historic first in the Arab world, bringing a president to justice. At his first court appearance Aug. 3, Mubarak "categorically denied all charges" from a hospital stretcher. His televised statement split opinions in Cairo, but it was also what some called an emotional catharsis for the Egyptian people. The trial was taken off public television, in part because of the confusion of having "about 600 lawyers representing the families of the martyrs," according to Joey Luke.

"This trial," as Egyptian-British journalist Sarah Carr explains, "is more important to Egypt's long-term future than the current state of affairs, in that with any luck it will make potential tyrants think twice." Unfortunately, it might also mean that Assad and Qaddafi do whatever they can to avoid facing justice themselves.

Christians need to 'stay involved'

In Egypt, recent protests in Tahrir dominated by Islamists calling for an Islamic state have renewed fears among Christians. Many moderate Muslims, however, share their concern. As a 23-year old Egyptian Muslim woman notes, "I absolutely do not want the Brotherhood in power. I am against the mixing of religion and politics." In May, the Brotherhood itself split over this issue, with younger members forming a separate party in defiance of the group's leaders, because they did not think elder Brotherhood members were doing enough to separate the religious and political arms of the group. But Luke, a Christian, remains positive: "I'm still optimistic about the future, regardless of all the nonsense from the Islamist groups." He points out that Egypt's culture is a combination of many cultures, not just Islam. Furthermore, "the people of this country will not tolerate a new sort of dictatorship in the name of religion … the revolution was initiated by liberal forces."

Celebrating the fall of Tripoli near Benghazi's courthouse.

Syrian President Assad still refuses to step down.

Though fear is a natural reaction for Christians, leaders are calling for calm and wisdom. Near Cairo at a Coptic retreat center, one Bishop has begun holding "civil society" training seminars for Christians, urging them to develop and use their political and social voices instead of backing away in fear.

"We must stay involved in re-building our country if we want it to be a country for all Egyptians" he says, echoing Anne Zaki (May 23, *CC)*. "My prayer for the church is that we remain engaged and invested in the present and future of our country, holding in tension the truth that we are in the world but not of it. To do otherwise is to tear ourselves from the forming fabric of the new Egypt, only to find ourselves living on a margin of our own design."

Complicit in Syria?

One of the most complex cases for Christians is in Syria, where President Assad's rule has presented them with a substantial freedom of religion over the last few decades. Unlike Egyptian Christians under Mubarak, in Syria Christians benefit from Assad's rule. Unfortunately, as Smith points out, this often meant turning a blind eye to the favouritism being given to them at the expense of other Syrians. As Spero news reports, "so far, all the heads of Christian churches in Syria have united in support of President Assad, with statements and in writing."

In May, after Assad promised a number of reforms, many Christians were saying, "it's over, it's done, there's nothing to worry about," says Smith. The protesters, however, quickly realized that the President's speeches were empty words and would not be backed by action.

Like in Egypt, Syrian Christians fear the religious motivation of some of the anti-regime demonstrators, though protesters insist that they are motivated by progressive ideas and a desire to end corruption, not exclusively by Islam. Many protesters have urged Christians to join them, emphasizing the need for unity and a better future for all Syrians. "Of course the Christians as well want more freedoms, on that we agree with the protesters, but we are mostly concerned about our safety," a businessman who declined to be named told the Egyptian Al Ahram newspaper.

Two down, more to go

Unfortunately, security-heavy Syria faces more pitfalls than Egypt, where activists have been heading towards greater change for years (through training in non-violent resistance, information sessions, labour strikes, and underground political organizations). "The walls have ears" was not an uncommon phrase to hear from Syrians, and the continued threat of spies and secret police keeps activists from the same kind of underground organization that happened in Cairo. CBC reports that even Syrians in Canada have received threatening phone calls for anti-regime messages posted on Facebook. Smith adds that additional differences include a smaller population, less poverty (a driving force in Egypt), more sectarianism, a lack of media presence and an army that is still largely allied with the president. He adds that the protesters have remained largely non-violent, and have continued to pay an extremely high price. But their patience may run out. "We of course hope for a peaceful resolution," he says, "but history and reality suggest that there may not be any positive outcomes for the foreseeable future."

Ousted Egyptian President Mubarak (c) and his sons on trial.

Revolutionary apparel is big business in Tahrir square.

In Egypt, political organization is in full swing, and Parliamentary elections have been set for mid-September, with Presidential elections to follow in October or November. Continued challenges include an electorate that is easily swayed by religious forces, a paternalistic military, declining security in the Sinai Peninsula and great economic instability. Optimism rises and falls, but as Mona el-Ghobashy blogs at "Steal This Hijab," "the revolution will undergo phases of setback, real or apparent. For Egypt's revolutionary situation to lead to a revolutionary outcome, existing structures of rule must be transformed. Citizens must be free to choose their presidents, governors, parliamentarians, faculty deans and village mayors, their trade union, student and professional association leaders. The coming years will reveal how much of that will happen and how."

For many years, hope and inspiration for some Egyptian activists came from Indonesia, where in 1998 President Suharto said of his own protesting citizens: "Just kill a few and they'll go home." His armed forces followed orders, but the people would not be swayed and Suharto soon resigned. This spring, Egyptians stood together just as firmly. Now, across the Middle East, from Yemen to Libya, others are following in the footsteps of the Tunisians and Egyptians, and refusing to go home.

Dena Nicolai lived and worked in Cairo, Egypt from 2006 to 2011. She is now a masters student at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C.

Christ @ Culture

Lloyd Rang

The scandal of the Reformed mind

The first sentence in Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* is, "The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind." As first sentences go, it doesn't get much better.

In the book, Noll showed how American evangelicals slowly turned away from higher learning and became anti-intellectual. It's a lament – written by a Christian academic watching a once-proud intellectual tradition fall apart.

When the book came out I was a recent graduate of Redeemer College and the MA program at Queen's University. As someone steeped in the tradition of the Reformed mind and the school of Kuyper, Bavinck and Dooyeweerd, I felt a little sorry for my spiritual cousins in the U.S., like Noll. And maybe a bit smug, too.

Redeemer College had been great basic training. There, I'd developed a well-rounded, Reformed world-and-life-view that allowed me to see things through what my profs called "the lens of scripture."

Then I went to Queen's. Graduate school was like being shipped off to the front lines. There, I crossed intellectual swords with the best-of-the-best from other philosophical and religious traditions: Marxists, feminists, Catholics, secular agnostics. We'd have long debates about ideas, late into the night. I never won, but I learned a lot and I never lost my faith. And that was the point.

The great thing about the Reformed intellectual tradition is how it accommodates other ideas. It encourages people to learn from them. Because we recognize that truth is revealed to us not only through scripture, but through all the gifts God has given us – through our pursuit of science, reason, philosophy and art, for example. That's why the Reformed churches of Canada have produced some really great academics, artists and intellectuals over the years.

So looking across the border at Mark Noll back in 1994, I felt bad for the guy. All around him, evangelicals were getting tired of debating people with other points of view. More and more, they felt like entrenched, weary foot soldiers in a never-ending culture war. On one side were the forces of "evil": liberals, secular humanists, intellectuals, artists and various other pointy-headed types. On the other were the forces of "good": conservatives, Bible-believing Christians, salt-of-the-earth folks who work hard and have good hearts.

Instead of engaging in cultural debates, evangelical Christians dug in and tuned out. And those trenches have only gotten deeper in the last two decades.

When some of us look at our neighbours to the south, we no longer see the United States of America, but a patchwork of red states and blue states. We see political and public debate that's less and less civil. And in many evangelical churches, the battle lines are clear: if you're some Volvo-driving, latte-slurping academic, you don't belong in church – and probably not in the country, either. "Academic" has come to be a synonym for "Godless."

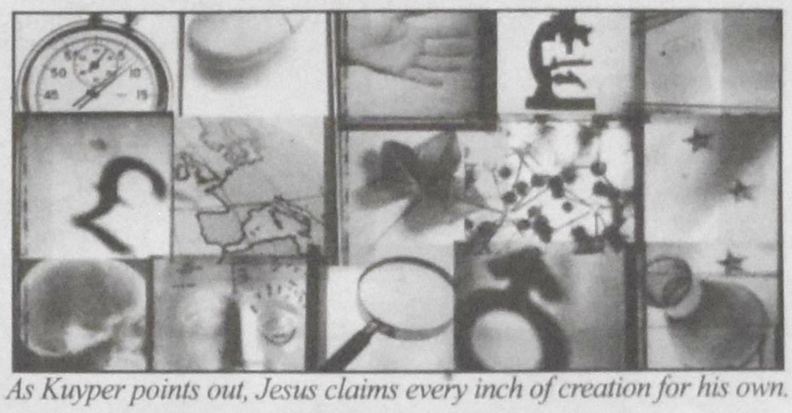
That attitude is creeping north.

Your brain and Jesus

A number of times in recent years, I've heard well-meaning but badly informed preachers talk about the "religion of global warming" and say that capitalism is a Christian economic system.

That's disturbing. Not because these are big-C conservative political positions, mind you. If someone preached about the inherent goodness of the poor that'd be a problem, too (not that they ever do, in my church). No, this is disturbing because these are the kinds of things people say when they're too lazy, or too tired, to think for themselves.

Church leaders should know better. The Bible doesn't take sides in scientific debates any more than it tells you how to replace the universal joint on a 1987 GMC Suburban Sierra. The Bible is a guideline for our spiritual lives. It is not, as some fundamentalists like to say, "the only book you ever need." We need other books. We need to rub shoulders with other ideas. We need to think, challenge ourselves, and be engaged.



As Kuyper points out, Jesus claims every inch of creation for his own.

It is not enough to have Jesus in your heart. He ought to be in your brain, too.

You should feel him in there, prodding you to ask questions, to think deeply, to consider the creation around you with wonder and genuine curiosity. That's the Reformed way. In the past, we didn't shrink from our obligation to learn and to grow in faith and knowledge. We resisted the urge, as Kuyper warned, "to bury our glorious orthodoxy in the treacherous pit of a spurious conservatism."

Instead, we took his call to arms seriously. As Kuyper once roared: "In the total expanse of human life there is not a single square inch of which the Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, 'That is mine!'"

And that includes the life of the mind.

Or, at least, it should.

Lloyd Rang (Lloyd.rang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ontario.

Post-9/11 *continued from page 1*

Rescue personnel such as these firefighters became iconic in media coverage of 9/11.

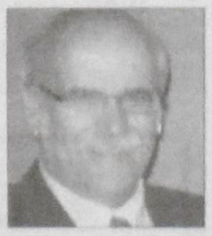
led war, Canada, under then-Prime Minister Chretien, did not enter, a decision most Canadians supported. While President Obama ended the US combat mission in Iraq in 2010, 50,000 US troops remain to advise the Iraqi security forces.

Obviously both theatres of war became, and continue to be, protracted wars, even though the Western military presence is winding down. National security forces have taken up the task to deal with ongoing insurgency. Recognizing that absolute defeat of the Taliban is unlikely, the Afghan leadership is putting out feelers to bring them into government and try to find peace. Restructuring and reform has occurred in both countries, but at a huge cost. The number of American lives lost in these conflicts long ago exceeded those lost on 9/11. However, as unsettling as it may be, this loss of American life on foreign soil was one of the goals of intervention in the Middle East. The junior Bush's plan, which his father studiously avoided following the liberation of Kuwait in Gulf War I, was to take the battle to the Middle East and purposefully put American troops in harm's way there. Those who want to battle the United States have engaged them abroad, and there have been no more successful terror attacks in the US. On US soil, Americans have only had to put up with the increasing Homeland Security requirements, a price that they are begrudgingly prepared to pay to keep terror away.

America's new reality

American stature in world affairs has definitely faltered in the last decade. Led by George W. Bush through many of those years, the United States was often a target for derision rather than respect. While lives lost in foreign wars are surely the most hurtful thing to American families, those same families have to deal with an American economy somewhat shattered by the immense burden of the military spending they have to support. Indeed, America's ability to obtain credit to fund its military and social services has been impaired. No political plan is in place to extricate America from this snare.

Memorial 9/11 events would have been overshadowed by Osama bin Laden's presence were he still alive to celebrate the10th anniversary of his Al-Qaeda terrorist attack. So most Americans certainly welcomed his death this year. But America and the world in general do not have much to celebrate. No progress has been made in the decade since 9/11 on peace between Israel and its neighbours, and the Palestinian quest for a homeland remains unresolved. As long as no progress is made on these fronts, the war on terror will not be won. This September 11 we should earnestly pray that it will not take another sadly memorable tragic event to remind us that the task of achieving peace in the Middle East remains undone.



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Editorials

Back to nature

Michael Buma

I spent my summer vacation this year at the tip of Southwestern Ontario's Bruce Peninsula, where the Niagara Escarpment rears up as a series of dolomite limestone cliffs and towers over the clean, cold aquamarine waters of Lake Huron's Georgian Bay. It's a place of stunning natural beauty, and my family has been going there for many years to relax, rejuvenate and play. Being on the Bruce brings to mind some lines from a familiar hymn: "This is my Father's world; / I rest me in the thought / Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas, / His hand the wonders wrought." As quite possibly the only piece of church music inspired by the Great Lakes, "This is my Father's world" is especially appropriate to the context of my summer vacation. Apparently the hymn's author, a late-nineteenth-century Presbyterian minister named Maltbie Babcock, would begin his frequent strolls along the shores of Lake Ontario by announcing "I'm going out to see my Father's world."

Although Babcock was an American viewing Lake Ontario from western New York, his ideas about nature were certainly in step with Canadian beliefs at the time. The practice of fleeing the city in pursuit of leisure, relaxation and recreation by the lake arose in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a time in which the nation was industrializing and its inhabitants were ceasing to be "hewers of wood and drawers of water" (to borrow Harold Innis's famous description of early Canadian industry, which itself is taken from the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua). It was around this time that people began to see nature as a spiritual resource as well as a tangible commodity, and the seeds of cottage country, modern conservationism and the national parks system were sown.

The beautiful Bruce Peninsula.

All of these movements and ideas have deeper roots in eighteenth-century Romanticism, an artistic and philosophical movement that emphasized the spiritually curative possibilities of nature. In fact, many Romantics became so immersed in nature's beauty that they lapsed into certain naturalistic and pantheistic heresies. The danger here, then, is that we might find comfort in nature rather than the God of nature. Isaiah 44:19 sums up the foolishness of this mistake quite succinctly: "Shall I bow down to a block of wood?" But I think there's another less obvious risk for Christians who seek spiritual rejuvenation in nature: the possibility that we might purposefully keep the experience at arm's length.

Cottage luxury

Back in the day, my family's preferred way of "going out to see our Father's world" was in a tent and some sleeping bags. In recent years, however, we've grown softer and have less patience for getting drenched when it rains. So we've taken to renting a cottage for a week each summer and making surgical strikes into nature, a luxury which affords the opportunity of ignominious retreat at the first sign of clouds. I'm mainly happy with this development, but part of me misses the elemental simplicity of waking up on the ground in my sleeping bag rather than a nice comfy bed in a modern cottage.

While early Canadian cottages tended to be minimally constructed with the idea of remaining rustic and getting "back to nature," modern cottages are often palatial all-season dwellings built primarily for comfort and luxury. In fact, the average price of a cottage in Ontario now surpasses that of an average single-family home in Toronto, the province's most expensive city. Certainly the gentrification of cottage country is troubling in and of itself, but the problem with all this luxury is that it can insulate us from the deep, primal power that God shows forth in nature. Let's face it: claiming you've immersed yourself in nature while staying in a modern cottage is a bit like going to a petting zoo and saying you've been on safari. We need to remember – and from time to time even experience – the fact that nature can be vast and terrifying, full of immeasurable depth and power. Sometimes it's good for us to get rained on, to have our senses of comfort and security challenged.

When God speaks to Job he does so out of a storm (Job 38:1). Then, much later, there's the story of the disciples being caught in a storm: their boat pitches and reels, and the waters are turbulent, deep and impenetrable. Yet all it takes to restore peace and safety is one word from Jesus. It seems to me that these stories are related: how can we truly understand rest if we haven't first experienced storm? And how can we begin to appreciate the depth of God's sovereignty until we recognize him as master of both? Although we still own our tents, my family will probably keep cottaging for the time being. And that's okay, as long as our appreciation of nature doesn't become completely anodyne and antiseptic. Given the chance, nature can remind us that God has the power to speak in storms and to calm them. I rest me in the thought.

Michael Buma teaches at the University of Western Ontario and is Interim Editor of the Christian Courier.

Christian Courier

Founded in 1945

An independent biweekly that seeks to engage creatively in critical Christian journalism, connecting Christians with a network of culturally savvy partners in faith for the purpose of inspiring all to participate in God's renewing work within his fallen creation.

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The paper is published the second & fourth Mondays of the month.

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Web site: christiancourier.ca

We acknowledge the assistance of the Government of Canada, through the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) for our publishing activities. Canada

Family matters

Kathy Vandergrift

At election time, every political leader seems concerned about families. In the recent federal election, the Conservatives offered a tax credit for recreation program fees to help families. The New Democrats promised to be a voice for working families. The Liberals proposed more support for caregivers in the family. While tax credits to help pay for sports or caregivers may be good ideas, they fall short of what is needed to support family life in Canada. The federal government has no coherent policy for supporting family life. Neither do most provinces. Family talk during elections is more about appealing to the adult, middle class voter than good public policy. It is another example of what happens when electoral politics replaces thoughtful public policy debate.

Instead of focusing on the middle class vote, suppose we approach family policy from the perspective of those who most need it – children who need family support. What would our priorities be then? If children were the focus, the following realities in Canada would be much higher on the political agenda.

First, children without families: of the 30-40,000 children who need a substitute permanent family each year and are eligible for adoption, only about seven percent are adopted. Canada has a much lower rate of child adoption than comparable countries that make it a priority through national strategies to find homes for children who need them.

Second, teenagers without support in transition to adult life: 16-year olds are released from foster care in some provinces, often without any attachment to a family or any adult to support them. They are at a major disadvantage, compared to their peers who count on their families to help them through university or provide a home between jobs as they enter the workforce. In some provinces, support is available until age 19, but not accessible by all young people in care. In addition, many told me they were not prepared for transition to adulthood. No one taught them money management, how to search for a job, how to manage an apartment – essential skills for independent living. "We need someone to cover our backs," they said. That's what families do for teenagers.

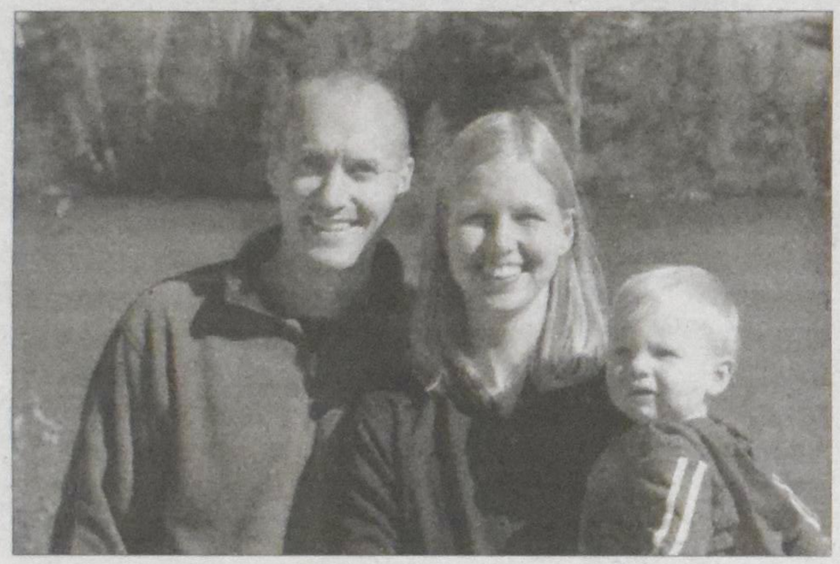
Third, focus on vulnerable groups of children: more aboriginal children are separated from their families now than during the days of residential schools. In most cases, the reason is not abuse but the neglect that results from poverty. In her last report, the highly respected Auditor General Sheila Fraser highlighted Canada's failure to protect the most basic rights of aboriginal children.

Finally, exploitation of children by their "family": Girls as young as 12 were taken from their homes in Bountiful, B.C., by leaders of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and given as "wives" to Warren Jeffs, now convicted of sexual exploitation of children in Texas. No one stepped in to protect the rights of these Canadian girls. The right to religious freedom does not include a right to exploit children and remove them from their home at will. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada 20 years ago, repeatedly confirms the right of every child to grow up in a safe, healthy family environment. The preamble recognizes "*that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her*

Buma appointed *CC* interim editor

ST. CATHARINES, Ont. – The board of Reformed Faith Witness, which publishes *Christian Courier*, announces the appointment of Michael Buma as interim editor of *CC*, effective August 15 this year. Buma is covering a one-year maternity leave for editor Angela Reitsma Bick. He joins features editor Cathy Smith and review editor Nick Schuurman in the task of putting out a unique and vibrant Christian newspaper.

Buma holds a Bachelor of Arts in English and History from Calvin College, and a Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy in English from the University of Western Ontario. He currently teaches in the English Department and School of Kinesiology at Western, and has previously taught at Redeemer University College and Laurier University's Brantford Campus. He has published several academic articles and chapters, and his book *Refereeing Identity: The Cultural Work of Canadian Hockey Novels* is forthcoming from McGill-Queen's University Press in 2012. Buma has also served as a Partner Missionary with Christian Reformed World Missions in Haiti and as the Christian Reformed Chaplain at Fanshawe College. He and his wife Selena live in London, Ontario with their son Logan (21 months).



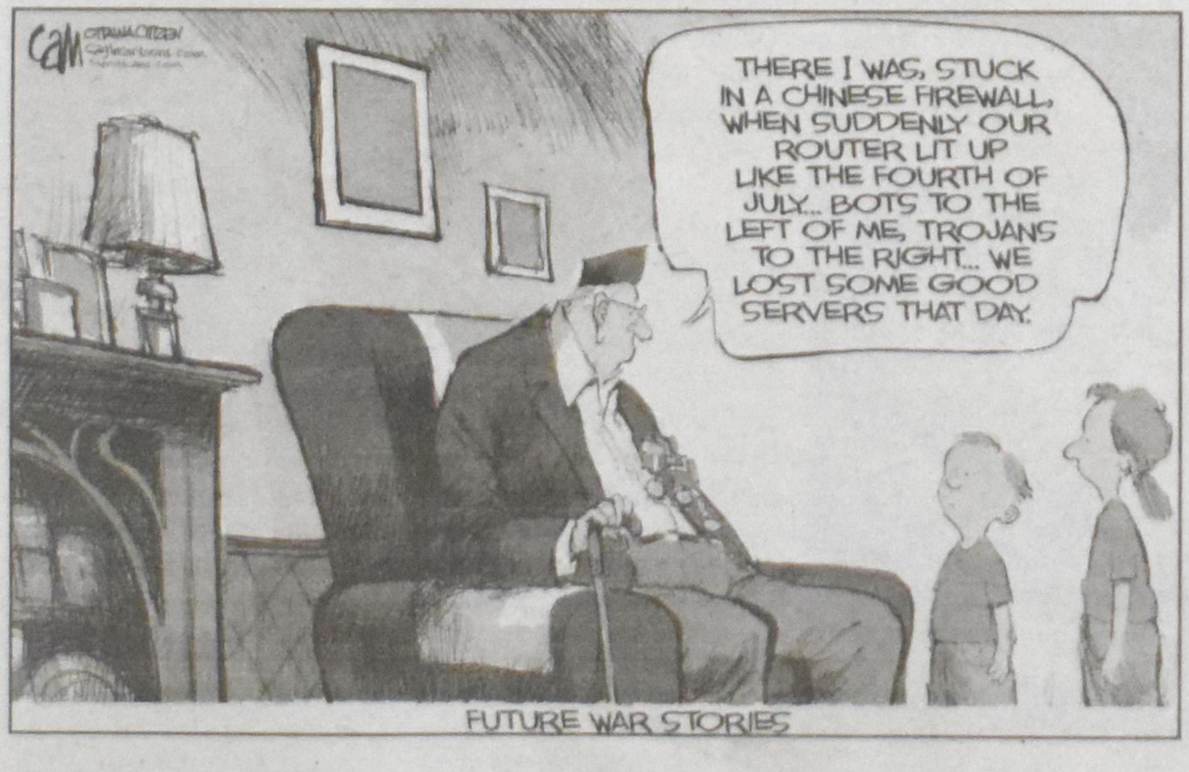
Family matters *continued from page 4*

personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding." Specific provisions of the Convention address the many factors that affect child development and specific groups of children, such as children in alternative care – all within a framework based on the right of a child to grow up in a family environment.

Very little, however, has been done in Canada to implement the Convention, in spite of the priority given to family by all political parties. Canada has no consistent policy framework that integrates all the factors that affect child development. If we want to be serious about support for family, let's start with a strategy that fulfills the right of every child to have a family.

In the context of an aging society, developing the full potential of every child makes good economic sense as well as being the right thing to do. Realizing the full potential of every child to contribute to society is the goal of the Convention. Putting children at the centre, like Jesus did, would be good for everyone and good for Canada.

Kathy Vandergrift, a public policy analyst, focused her Master's Thesis in Public Ethics on a comparison of different ethical foundations for children's rights. She lives in Ottawa.


THERE I WAS, STUCK IN A CHINESE FIREWALL, WHEN SUDDENLY OUR ROUTER LIT UP LIKE THE FOURTH OF JULY... BOTS TO THE LEFT OF ME, TROJANS TO THE RIGHT... WE LOST SOME GOOD SERVERS THAT DAY.
FUTURE WAR STORIES

Church doctrine and membership matter

In "Looking back, looking forward: 60 years of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada" (July 25, *CC*) Anne van Arragon Hutten writes that "it became clear to my family that the Kentville CRC was no longer the place for us," without explaining why. This is not very helpful. The broader message of the article is that church doctrine, church organization and a stable church membership are no longer important, which is perhaps why many people so readily [switch churches].

In this day and age, religion is another consumer item: personal satisfaction, gratification and comfort [trump] any sense of responsibility, obligation and loyalty to a congregation or denomination. This trend seems to be consistent with (and perhaps the result of) an ever-increasing individualism that might, according to some historians, eventually be the downfall of Western civilization.

Withdrawing from a congregation and joining another one can have two, long-term negative consequences. In the first place, it is not uncommon that when families and individuals break ties with a congregation and/or denomination with which they have had a long, perhaps even life-long, connection to and join another, they eventually cease to attend church altogether. Secondly, it is difficult for a congregation to survive if its membership is in a constant state of flux. It raises the question of whether the Christian church can survive if individual congregations do not possess some kind of formal and stable organization.

Having studied and taught church history much of my life, I cannot but conclude that doctrine and organization are crucial to the health of the Christian church and religion and, on that account, indispensible to the individual believer. Without them, denominations and their congregations would simply become nondescript, amorphous movements lacking all sense of purpose and direction, and, eventually, all relevance as well.

Gerry Gerrits
Retired from the Department of History and Classics,
Acadia University, Wolfville, N.S.

'Creationist' doesn't mean 'simpleton'

John Suk should know better. In his guest editorial, "The DNA says evolution; What about the Church?" (Aug. 8, *CC*), he pits the six-day creationist position against his own view that God made use of evolution, and he then advises us that Christians need to accept evolution.

What so disappointed me was his depiction of the creationist position – it was a classic straw man tactic, depicting your opponent as a simpleton to make your own case seem stronger. Pastor Suk might be surprised to know there are countless PhD-holding, six-day-creation-believing scientists, and none of them believe that genetic similarities between us and Neanderthals are, as Pastor Suk writes: "a red herring that God threw into the DNA – maybe for fun, or maybe to test our faith in the literalist interpretation of Genesis."

This is caricature of creationist belief. Pastor Suk shows himself to either be incredibly unfair in this depiction of the creationist position or incredibly ignorant of it. I would suggest that before he write on this topic, he should first get an understanding of it. By visiting websites such as **AnswersinGenesis.org**, **Creation.com** or **ICR.org**, he could learn what the other side actually thinks, and why creationists don't believe that science and the traditional, plain reading of Genesis conflict.

Jon Dykstra
Lynden, Washington

Christian Courier

Member of Canadian Church Press and Evangelical Press Association

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two yrs. (48 issues)	$100.00	

Advertising deadlines: display and classified advertising: Tuesday, 9 a.m. (13 days before publication date) See classified pages or web site **www.christiancourier** for more details. (ISSN 1192-3415) Published second and fourth Mondays of the month.

Address all correspondence to: 5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311 or 1-800-969-4838
e-mail: Advertising: ads@christiancourier.ca
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PRINTED IN CANADA

News

Government restrictions, social hostilities hinder faith globally

WASHINGTON, D.C. (CNA) – More than 2.2 billion people live in countries where government restrictions on religion or social hostilities involving religion rose "substantially" in recent years, a new report says.

Restrictions on religious beliefs and practices substantially rose between mid-2006 and mid-2009 in 14 of the world's 198 countries but substantially decreased in eight countries, says the Pew Forum's report "Rising Restrictions on Religion." Countries with rises in government restrictions on religion include Algeria, Egypt, France, Hong Kong, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Serbia and Malaysia.

Ten countries had a substantial increase in religion-related social hostilities: Bulgaria, China, Denmark, Mongolia, Nigeria, Russia, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom and Vietnam.

Restrictions on religious beliefs and practices are "particularly common" in countries that prohibit blasphemy, apostasy or defamation of religion, says the report. By mid-2009, 59 countries had such laws, rules or policies at some level of government. Penalties range from fines to imprisonment or death and have been enforced in 44 of the 59 countries.

"While such laws are sometimes promoted as a way to protect religion and reduce social hostilities involving religion, in practice they often serve to punish religious minorities whose beliefs are deemed unorthodox or heretical, and who therefore are seen as threatening religious harmony in the country," the Pew report says.

Social hostilities, including mob violence, occur more often in countries with such laws. Eighty percent of the countries in the Middle East-North Africa region have such laws, and these are enforced in 60 percent of them. Nearly 40 percent of European countries have such laws and 31 percent of countries actively enforce them.

Christians face the most widespread harassment

The report also cited the French discussion on whether women should be allowed to wear the burqa, as well as French government attempts to declare the Church of Scientology to be a "criminal enterprise." In Serbia the government refused legal registration for Jehovah's Witnesses and several other minority religious groups. Some Serbian officials referred to minority religious groups as "sects" or "other pejorative terms," Pew says.

Christians were harassed in 130 countries while Muslims were harassed in 117 countries. Jews faced harassment in 75 countries, Hindus faced harassment in 27 countries, while Buddhists faced harassment in 16. Members of other religious groups in 84 countries reported harassment.

The report said harassment and intimidation take many forms, including physical assaults, arrests, the desecration of holy sites and discrimination against religious groups in employment, education or housing. Harassment also includes verbal assaults.

Christians experienced governmental and social harassment in about the same number of countries, while Jews experienced social harassment in many more countries than where they faced government harassment.

In recent years in the U.S. there were some 1,300 reports annually involving religious bias, FBI reports say.

The Pew report was based on 18 sources of information, including reports from the United Nations, the U.S. State Department and Human Rights Watch.

Since the time period covered by the report, social tensions and government restrictions concerning religious belief have flared up in some countries. Controversies over mosque construction and Catholic adoption agencies' desire to follow Christian ethics (e.g., declining to adopt children to homosexual couples) continue to arise in the United States.

In Egypt, Coptic Christian women are increasingly forced to marry and convert to Islam. Forced conversions are also a problem in Pakistan, where extremist defenders of the country's strict blasphemy law have assassinated several high-ranking government officials who have criticized the law.

The communist government of Vietnam has been accused of religious freedom violations, including detention of priests and crackdowns on Catholics seeking the return of confiscated property. Leonard Leo, chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, has called for Vietnam to be re-designated as a Country of Particular Concern for its "particularly severe violations of religious freedom."

In June 2011, over two and a half years into the Obama presidency in the U.S., American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hosted the swearing in of Baptist pastor Suzan Johnson Cook as the Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom. The post had been empty since President Obama's inauguration. Critics saw the long delay as a sign of the Obama administration's lack of vigilance concerning global religious freedom.

Canadian couple to spend five months in Kenya for CRWRC

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – When Margaret and Rients Mazereeuw of Lethbridge, Alberta, received word about the extreme drought facing Eastern Africa, they were compelled to respond. After receiving a phone call from the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) they began preparing to spend five months in drought-ridden Kenya.

They left Canada on August 10 to begin coordinating on behalf of CRWRC the distribution of emergency food, water, and animal feed to thousands of families.

"The Lord has blessed us graciously in so many ways," said the couple. "We want to serve God by serving others. We can only make a small difference, but we pray it gives us more awareness and insight into the situation of others so we can be better ambassadors for them and for our Lord."

The couple are two of 26 volunteer International Relief Managers (IRMs) that CRWRC has trained to be ready to serve in times of need. When crisis situations arise, these volunteers put their North American lives on hold and serve for several months at a time around the world.

The Mazereeuws are now in Nairobi, Kenya. During their five months in Kenya, they and three other IRMs will help CRWRC manage and distribute food, water, and livestock feed to 112,000 people in desperate need in Isiolo, Mbeere, Tharaka, Narok, Kajiado, Turkana, West Pokot, Laikipa, Taita, Taveta and Kilifi. The response includes direct emergency aid, and in some areas also distribution of food in exchange for work on projects such as water catchment basins, tree planting and growing grass to feed livestock.

CRWRC also employs a disaster risk reduction specialist to work within drought-affected communities to improve their ability to prepare for future droughts and increase their likelihood of survival long-term.

CRWRC is also responding in Ethiopia and Somalia by supporting the work of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (of which it is a member), the Global Relief Alliance and the ACT Alliance. In total, CRWRC has planned $9 million in emergency aid in response to this drought crisis. They plan to reach 145,000 drought-stricken people (20,500 families) in the region.

Young Canadian Catholics deepen faith at World Youth Day

MADRID (CNA/EWTN News) – Over 5,000 Canadian young people began the Catholic Church's World Youth Day celebration in mid-August with a rally at which they prayed, sang and celebrated their faith.

"The Lord has a wonderful way of placing things and timing things," said Father Thomas Rosica, organizer of the event at Madrid's Palacio de Deportes. "It wasn't until we were preparing, though, that somebody said to me, 'Do you realize you're the first event of World Youth Day?'"

The 90-minute event – conducted in both English and French – was also the first time the Canadian Catholic Church had attempted such a mass gathering at a World Youth Day on foreign soil. World Youth Day is held every three years, each time in a different country. This year it was in Spain.

Father Rosica's gathering of young Canadians included testimonies from some who had taken part in World Youth Day in Toronto in 2002. There were also speeches from various Canadian bishops, 22 of whom were present.

"We are delving into the mystery of our faith, the beautiful faith of the church, in which we're immersed at the time of our baptism. And as we do, we pray that the Holy Spirit will lead us to a new encounter with Jesus Christ," Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton told the young pilgrims. There was also music by a rock singer-priest from Australia.

"It was really great, it was awesome, it made me think more about the faith and the way everybody spoke about it was very inspiring," said 13-year-old Emily Ouillette of Kamloops, B.C.

"The youth will always bring new life to the church. If we can inspire the youth of Canada it'll be the grassroots swelling to keep our faith alive," said Fr. Andrew L'Heureux. "To give the children an understanding a great love of God is the most important thing – if our young people can understand how much God loves them . . . then they will inspire the rest of the country."

"This is the beginning of something," Fr. Rosica predicted. "The fact that there are over 6,000 Canadians present here at the moment in Madrid is incredible. The fact they wanted to gather together is another great gift. It was quite beautiful."

News

Gay clergy decision may split Canadian Lutherans, says pastor

Marian Van Til, *with files from Lifesite News, LCC, ELC*

WINNIPEG – Increasing signs of fracture are appearing among Canada's Lutherans over the issue of homosexuality. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) recently voted to perform same-gender "marriages" and to permit practicing homosexuals to become pastors. The ELCIC is a sister church to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), which made that same decision two years ago.

Another body of Canadian Lutherans are those in the Lutheran Church-Canada (LCC). They have ties to their counterpart in the U.S., the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS), both of which are biblically orthodox denominations.

Nolan Astley is the pastor at Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Kitchener, Ontario, and serves as vice president of the Lutheran Church-Canada, which he describes as "the biblical-based branch" of Lutherans.

"Our concern is what's happening not just in the Evangelical Lutheran Church here in Canada, but elsewhere as well," says Astley. "Social concerns and society's norms are becoming the norms for the church, and that's a matter of grave concern."

Astley says that by just reading comments from people within the ELCIC online he senses that many members and pastors of the more liberal denomination are grieving over the recent vote. "This is not something that was accepted overwhelmingly by their church body," he says. "There are many, many within it who have strong reservations based on Scripture and our Lutheran confessions against what their church body has done."

The dilemma for those church members, says Astley, is whether to remain part of the liberal body and fight to overturn the decision, or simply leave and become a part of the Lutheran Church-Canada, which is based on biblical teaching on the subject.

Astley says that those who have contacted his branch of the Lutheran Church about making the change have been approached with a welcoming attitude. But his group is not actively soliciting churches to change membership, he says.

Pakistan: Christians beaten for showing Jesus film

ABBOTTABAD, Pakistan – In this city in eastern Pakistan where Osama bin Laden was killed on May 2, members of a Protestant church were beaten for showing a movie on Jesus in a city park last month. The Christians' angry Muslim attackers also smashed the film projector.

Several copies of the Bible were also found in dumps after the Full Gospel Assembly tried distributing 100,000 copies around the country.

Christians in the area were not united, however, on the advisability of public showing of the film. The members of the Full Gospel Assembly who hosted the film – and were beaten – were castigated by a retired Catholic archbishop for their "stupidity." Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha is unhappy that "the whole [Christian] community has to bear the brunt of their indiscretion." The Assembly of God members should have been "mindful of the delicate situation" he asserted.

But a fellow Catholic colleague of the archbishop's didn't heed those words. The attack in the park came just over a week after authorities interrogated Fr. Akram Gill, a local Catholic priest, for looking at Osama bin Laden's former house near Pakistan's top military academy. The media has been denied access to the area since last month.

"I took a foreign friend to the house of a Catholic living near the compound. We were taken away minutes after we climbed on his rooftop," said Fr. Gill. "I learnt a lot from that experience," he said. "Christians cannot afford to get involved in risky situations, especially after the bin Laden episode."

New Common English Bible too common, say critics

Marian Van Til, *with files from CCO and CNW*

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (CCO/CNW) – Some 700 people and a budget of $3.5 million (US) were involved in bringing the Common English Bible to print. The "ecumenical" Bible was released in mid-August. About 200 scholars from two dozen Protestant denominations and 12 Catholic were among the 700.

The CEB, as the translation is being referred to, is already making waves, though it was to have been "a translation that unites rather than divides," according to associate publisher Paul Franklyn. It was tested by 500 readers who were asked to read aloud and identify confusing passages.

In the Beatitudes, "Happy" replaces "blessed": "Happy are people who are downcast, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.... Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.... Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs..." (Matthew 5:3, 8, 10).

The CEB translates other familiar passages in new ways. The Lord God "formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land" rather than from the "dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7), and Gen. 1:11 reads: "God said, 'Let the earth grow plant life: plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind throughout the earth.' And that's what happened."

'Human One' replaces 'Son of Man'

The CEB also tried to be as gender-inclusive as possible. It eschews the word "man" in several passages: Christ is referred to as the "Human One" rather than the "Son of Man" (Matt. 10:23), and "the human" replaces "the man" in Genesis 2 ("with the rib taken from the human, the Lord God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being").

J.F. Hobbins, a biblical languages scholar, has an Ancient Hebrew Poetry website. There, he calls attention to problems with Old and New Testament continuity in the CEB. "It is not 'an evil and adulterous generation' that asks for a sign, but 'an evil and faithless generation' in CEB (Matt 12:39). That destroys the connection with the Old Testament subtext (Hosea; Ezekiel; and so on). At the very least, it takes the sexual innuendo out of it, what you do, I guess, when teaching the faith to people who on other days of the week watch 'Desperate Housewives.'"

He continued, "'Blasphemy against the Spirit' becomes 'insulting the Spirit' (Matt 12:31). But insulting is too weak. I admit there is a part of me, the teacher in me, not the poet, that wants to get rid of the word blasphemy. The dilemma is this: once you get what the word means – slander of the vilest sort – blasphemy becomes the best of all possible translations. It is, however, always helpful to explain that Matthew 12:31 means to say that slander of every kind is forgivable, but not slander against the Spirit, which is what people do when they attribute the Spirit's work to the devil."

Gender inclusivity

The new Bible's reading level was deliberately set at a 4th or 5th grade, which causes the biblical text to lose depth and nuance, say critics. Others, including Dr. Joel B. Green, professor of New Testament interpretation at Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California, believe that it is actually an "academically excellent" translation. Green admits that the seminary has already approved the CEB for use at Fuller primarily because it "reflects our strong position regarding women in leadership." Green was one of the CEB's New Testament editors.

Many critics, including bloggers, consider the new translation banal rather than simply easily readable. They question what they see as the "bad theology" evidenced in many of the translating decisions. One critic, Dr. Frank Matta, pointed out that among the translators were many unbelievers. He questioned the appropriateness of the Word of God being translated by people who don't believe that it *is* the Word of God.

The CEB was sponsored by five mainline Protestant denominations and their church-supported publishers: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and its Chalice Press; the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Westminster John Knox Press; the Episcopal Church and Church Publishing, Inc.; the United Church of Christ and The Pilgrim Press; and The United Methodist Church and its Abingdon Press.

The new version was edited by scholars from several Christian denominations "for the purpose of making the translations available for conservative churches," a CEB spokesperson told the press. "This is trying to make a bridge between conservatives, moderates and liberals."

Whether that will happen seems doubtful, according to some of those "conservatives and moderates."

Study: Cohabitation eclipses divorce as key risk factor for children

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Virginia (NMPUV/CCO) – North America has seen an explosion in the number of couples who live together and raise children without benefit of marriage. A new study shows that the number of couples in the U.S. in that category has increased by 1200 percent since 1970.

The study by the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia made a discovery that many were not expecting. It is not divorce but the cohabitation of children's parents that has the most debilitating effect on those children. And cohabitation, rather than divorce, has become the most common reason why children are not living with their parents.

Cohabitation by unmarried parents is "the largest unrecognized threat to the quality and stability of children's family lives," the study has found. Entitled "Why Marriage Matters," the study shows that children living with unmarried parents are more likely to suffer from abuse and neglect, and far more likely to see their parents break up before they are teenagers.

In the past 20 years, the number of 16-year-old Americans living with both parents has dropped from 66 to 55 percent, with the numbers much higher in some socio-economic groups, especially among the poor. Divorce levels have actually dropped since the mid-1970s, but family instability has continued to increase. That's because children born to cohabiting unions are much more likely to experience a parental breakup than children born to married couples.

The study concluded that "the intact, biological married family remains the gold standard for family life.... Children are most likely to thrive – economically, socially and psychologically – in this family form."

"Marriage is an important public good," concluded said the study. "associated with a range of economic, health, educational and safety benefits that help...governments serve the common good." The study also noted that "the benefits of marriage extend to poor, working class and minority communities" as well.

Columns

A hard look at hunger

Will Braun

Once again, famine plagues the headlines and swollen bellies afflict the airwaves. The Horn of Africa is hungry.

Babies are dying, statistics are swirling, and the rest of the global village, wired as it is, has pulled up a front-row seat.

Since the food crisis in Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya debuted in the news, most of us have been affronted by images of timid and blank-eyed starving children. Such images present a dilemma for me: Are they an accurate depiction of reality – one that evokes compassion – or are they invasions of dignity that turn human suffering into a numbing side show?

Susie Linfield argues that graphic images of suffering, however problematic they may be, are necessary. She is a professor at New York University and a prominent commentator on photojournalism. She disagrees with the critics who say a continual stream of "atrocity photography" deadens our sensitivity to human suffering.

"Far from dulling our senses, photography has been a key component in the creation of what we think of as the modern human-rights consciousness," she wrote in the Fall 2009 issue of *Geez* magazine. Linfield admits that human sensitivity is still limited, but she argues that awareness of, and responsiveness to, global human need is greater now than it ever has been, and photography deserves some of the credit.

Linfield quotes a human rights activist who expresses concern that images of starving African children inappropriately put "people's bodies, their misery, their grief and their fears on display." Linfield does not dispute that such photos are "radically discomfiting" and imperfect, but she response with a question: "Is there an unproblematic way to show the destruction of a person?"

CRWRC's famine photos emphasize that we are all God's children.

PHOTOS BY JACQUELINE KOSTER

She warns of a danger greater than problematic photos: "a desire not to look at the world" at all.

I find Linfield's argument convincing, yet I am offended by the famine photos I see. I question the intent behind them. I can't imagine myself taking such photos. And I can't imagine a Somali father proudly pinning up a newspaper clipping of his emaciated, unnamed, unclothed child.

While many mainstream news outlets do not hesitate to use famine pornography – as it is called – Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) takes a different approach. "I just feel it's wrong, it's manipulative," Christina de Jong said of the stereotypical famine images. De Jong, who works in the communications department at CRWRC, said that when choosing images to portray famine, she and her colleagues seek to ensure that the dignity of people in photos remains intact. "We see them as image-bearers of God, children of God," she said.

In many cases, "all they have left is their dignity," and inappropriate photos can rob them of that.

Would CRWRC bring in more money if it used graphic famine photos? "I don't think our constituency would respond well to that," de Jong said. She does not want to use images that induce guilt but rather ones that give a sense of hope and portray people as "active agents of change in their communities," as CRWRC's core values stipulate.

While de Jong acknowledges a tension between protecting people's dignity and portraying the full urgency of the famine, she believes it is possible to depict the situation in a way that highlights the basic human commonality we all share. Her aim is to create a "sense of an 'us,'" a sense that "we are the same."

Are graphic famine photos necessary or exploitive? The answer is not simple. Atrocities should not happen behind closed doors; we must be willing to look at the world. At the same time, the divinely granted dignity of each person must be upheld. Ultimately, we should not need to be shamed or shocked into caring.

Will Braun attends Hope Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. This article was adapted for CC *from a piece that originally appeared at* canadianmennonite.org.

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

A Conservative dynasty?

Five years ago I was invited by columnist Lorne Gunter to speak at the annual meeting of the Civitas Society in Ottawa. This was after he read an article I had written for the Cardus publication, *Comment.* Although the organization touts itself as "a strictly non-partisan 'society where ideas meet'," it soon became clear to me that this gathering of journalists, academics, prominent politicians and political aides was only too pleased to celebrate the recent victory of Stephen Harper's minority Conservative government at the polls. Tasting the first fruits of political power, Stephen Harper himself made an unscheduled appearance with his entourage on that first evening of the event.

The most revealing session of this meeting was an in-house talk by Frank Luntz, the American pollster and consultant – or spin-doctor, in current parlance – whose work for the Republican Party had contributed to two electoral victories for President George W. Bush. Somewhat to my surprise, Luntz told the gathering that, if Harper's party were to listen to his advice, he could help them create a Conservative dynasty that would last for 20 years. At the time this seemed somewhat implausible. After all, the Liberals had ruled virtually unopposed for more than a decade and could still claim in some fashion to be Canada's "natural governing party." The newly elected Conservatives had only a minority in the House of Commons, and the Bloc Québécois had a stranglehold on La Belle Province, apparently preventing any other party from achieving majority status.

I was reminded of Luntz's promise after the Canadian people gave the Conservatives their coveted majority in May, demoted the Liberals to third place, virtually eliminated the Bloc as a political force and elevated the New Democrats to official opposition. Now the notion of a lengthy Conservative dynasty does not seem nearly as far-fetched as it did in 2006. The NDP has just lost Jack Layton and is being led for the time being by a neophyte. Michael Ignatieff has become only the second federal Liberal leader, after Stéphane Dion, not to become prime minister. Finding a suitable replacement will not be easy for the deeply-divided party.

Role of the opposition

Even those otherwise sympathetic with the federal Conservatives' policies should be uneasy with the current state of affairs. One senses that Harper and company have smelled blood and are going in for the kill. Yet a healthy democratic polity requires more than one robust political party. These parties must be fairly evenly matched to preserve the genuinely competitive character of elections. A ruling party must function under a realistic threat of being defeated in the next election; otherwise it will become complacent and take its popular mandate for granted. Where one party is repeatedly favoured to win, corruption and injustice are likely to creep into its activities.

If Stephen Harper wishes to leave behind a positive legacy for Canada, he should do what he can to support the New Democrats' choice of an able leader who will keep the Conservatives on their toes and hold them to account for their policies. A weakened opposition unable to perform this vital task will tempt the government to pursue policies of short-term benefit to itself but detrimental to the public interest just because they can get away with it.

One of the things that brought down the Liberals in 2006 was public indignation over the Sponsorship Scandal, which saw their government disbursing funds by questionable means to advertising firms for unclear purposes. It did so during a period when its position in the House of Commons was virtually unassailable, facing as it did a divided opposition. During Luntz's address to Civitas, he emphasized the "disgusting" waste of tax dollars by the Liberals – something intended to appeal to the participants' sense of justice.

However, partisanship itself can be taken to unjust lengths. Partisans are more easily outraged by their opponents' missteps than by their own. Reinhold Niebuhr once observed that those fancying themselves the "children of light" underestimate the power of self-interest in themselves even as they see it in their enemies. Yet if we understand clearly the teachings of Scripture, we must admit that everyone, and not just our opponents, has sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). This recognition will keep us from embracing a narrow partisanship that ignores the good in our adversaries and the evil in ourselves.

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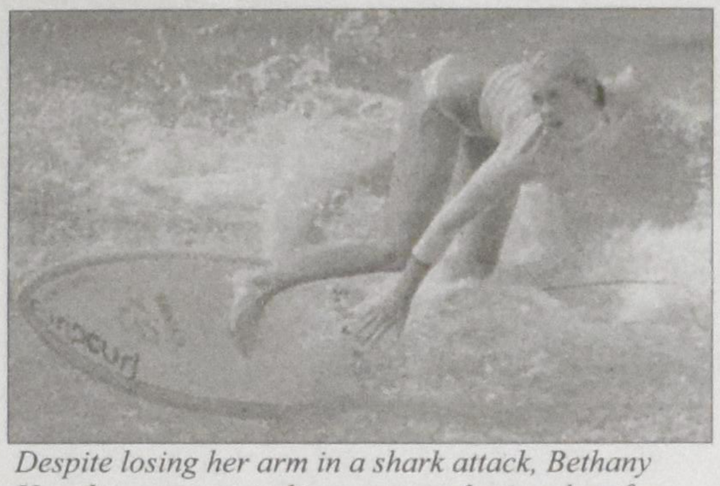
Reviews

Shark attack doesn't stop surfer

Bethany Van Lingen

Bethany Hamilton, a talented, 13-year-old surfer, is out on the water. It is a bright and sunny morning in Kauai, Hawaii. She is practising with her surfing instructor for her next competition. Bethany had raced down the beach, surfboard clamped under her arm, to get to the ocean and start surfing.

That morning in 2003, the day of Halloween, Hamilton was swimming out to catch a wave when she was attacked by a 14-foot tiger shark. She lost her left arm in the attack and about 60 percent of the blood in her body from the injury. This is the story told in the film, *Soul Surfer*, directed by Sean McNamara. The film is based on the true story of Bethany Hamilton, as told in her book, *Soul Surfer*.



Despite losing her arm in a shark attack, Bethany Hamilton went on to become a professional surfer.

In the movie, Hamilton, played by AnnaSophia Robb, wakes up in the middle of the night. She is in her hospital bed. Turning to her dad, Tom Hamilton, she asks when she can go surfing again. She is pale and there are dark circles beneath her eyes.

Tom Hamilton, played by Dennis Quaid, replies with a grin, "Are you busy right now?"

"Kinda," Hamilton says in a raspy voice.

A month after the shark attack, Hamilton heads back out into the water. After three tries, she is able to stand on her surfboard and ride a wave. Two months after losing her arm, Bethany Hamilton participates in the surfing competition she had been preparing for before the attack. But she can't keep up with her competitors in the water. She places fifth in the competition. Disappointed and frustrated, Hamilton considers giving up surfing altogether.

She questions her faith in God. In another scene, Hamilton, with tears on her face, asks her youth leader, Sarah Hill, played by Carrie Underwood, "How can this be God's plan for me?"

The audience's sniffles ripple through the theatre. It's heartbreaking to see this 13-year-old girl left with such a difficult question. Why would God allow Hamilton to lose her arm and with it, a great deal of her ability to surf? Why should she have to give up what she loved most? There is no satisfying answer to that question, nor is one attempted in the film.

"I don't pretend to have all the answers to why bad things happen to good people, but I do know that God knows all those answers, and sometimes he lets you know in this life . . ." the real Bethany Hamilton says in her book.

She may not be able to explain why God let the attack happen, but that does not stop Hamilton from living a life of faith.

"I have this thought every second of my life – Why me?" Hamilton writes in her book. "Not negatively, like 'Why did this terrible thing happen to me?' But more like 'Why did God choose me and what does he have in mind for me?'"

In the *Soul Surfer* movie, Hamilton travels to Phuket, Thailand after the 2004 tsunami. There, she helps a little boy, terrified of the ocean water that had destroyed his home and his family, learn to surf in that same ocean.

I wanted to bawl my eyes out.

Hamilton was able to turn the suffering she'd experienced into a blessing through her faith. In the film, Hamilton is asked by a reporter if she would still go out in the water that morning if she had known the shark attack would happen. She replied, "If I didn't go out, I wouldn't have this chance to embrace more people than I ever could with two arms."

The real Bethany Hamilton became a professional surfer in 2007.

Hamilton said in a video interview on the film's website that she hopes, through the film, to ". . . encourage everyone, young and old, in their own lives to learn to love others more because I think that what this world needs is more love toward other people. We're all not perfect, all of us have something wrong with us, but all it takes is a little love."

The *Soul Surfer* story is, at heart, a search for God in the darkest of times. The film may not leave you dry-eyed, but it certainly leaves you hopeful. Watch *Soul Surfer*. Invite your family, bring your friends and make sure to have extra tissues.

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Going apes over cinematic de-evolution

Nick Schuurman

To be honest, going into the theatre, I hadn't watched even one of the five original *Planet of the Apes*. Neither had I seen any of the TV spinoffs, cartoon adaptations, Tim Burton's 2001 remake, *or* read any of the comic books. All I had to take with me was an elementary understanding of the series' plot and the image of Roddy McDowall wearing a monkey mask which, sometime between 1968 and present day, managed to etch itself indelibly into my memory.

The original science fiction epic, based on the 1963 French novel *La planète des singes* by Pierre Boulle went something like this: astronauts crash land on a mysterious, seemingly lifeless, planet. Eventually they run into apes, who have evolved in intelligence and are able to speak. The primates are in fact part of a complex civilization, in which the natural order has been reversed: apes are the dominant species, and humans plod around, mute and clad in animal skins. Drama and action follow. Sounds cheesy, I know, but it was relatively well-received in its day, had some measure of philosophical depth, and is still considered an important work of film.

Fast forward to 2011. If you've been anywhere near a theatre in the past few years, you will no doubt have noticed a growing trend in Hollywood. Films and television shows we watched as children, that our *parents* watched, are being "rebooted." *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is both an adaptation of the original series and an attempt to offer an origin to the story. The two questions that stood unanswered behind the originals (How did the apes evolve to such a heightened level of intelligence and develop the ability to speak? and How did humanity fall to the place they did?) are answered with this most recent version.

Right from the opening scene, it becomes obvious that director Rupert Wyatt and the film's writers are working around these questions. For this reason, the plot's creative solution seemed forced, and at times little more than a lead-in for the half hour of primate-versus-human mayhem that ends the film.

Will Rodman, played by James Franco (*127 Hours, Milk*), is a young scientist, working for a major pharmaceutical corporation whose current project is developing a cure for Alzheimer's. He is personally invested, somewhat predictably, on account of the fact that his father, Charles, (played by John Lithgow) is suffering from the disease. The film begins with a breakthrough: the drugs they have been experimenting with on apes seem to have taken effect on one subject who shows signs of increased mental capacity. Things soon go wrong, however, and Rodman is left to raise the ape's newborn, Caesar.

Rise of the Planet of the Apes
directed by Rupert Wyatt.
20th Century Fox, 2011.

Caesar, one of the movie's many computer generated apes, is played by the same man behind The Lord of the Rings' *Gollum.*

What follows is reminiscent of the awkward fascination the 1990s found in pairing animals with humans in leading roles. Rodman takes Caesar home, where he grows and continues to exhibit (as result of the drugs) unusual intellectual capacities. Even though his company has canceled further research, he manages to sneak a few samples from the lab to give to his father. His condition improves dramatically. A love interest is introduced. All is well.

The peace does not last long, though. After a series of violent confrontations with a neighbour, Caesar is sent to a run-down sanctuary for primates. Charles develops an immunity to the drug and, as result, again suffers the effects of his condition. Upset by both turns of events, a desperate Will confesses to his boss what he did, and reveals that there is still hope for a drug yet – if it is further developed. Seeing the potential for investment, his employer agrees, and research resumes.

Meanwhile, an increasingly-embittered Caesar sits in the prison of the government-run facility. It is here that he begins to loathe the humanity he began to resemble, and plot an escape, and an overthrow.

Visually, the computer-generated images are impressive, though at times a bit rough. One of the film's most remarkable features is the performance of Andy Serkis, the man behind Caesar the ape. Serkis is the actor whose motion and speech provided the film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy with Gollum.

While an entertaining summer flick, the film lacks depth. Secondary to the plot and the action, the characters are left as clichés. And though the story lends itself to some of our generation's sensibilities (concerns for animal rights, distrust of corporations, the pharmaceutical enterprise), *Rise* stays in the philosophical shallows.

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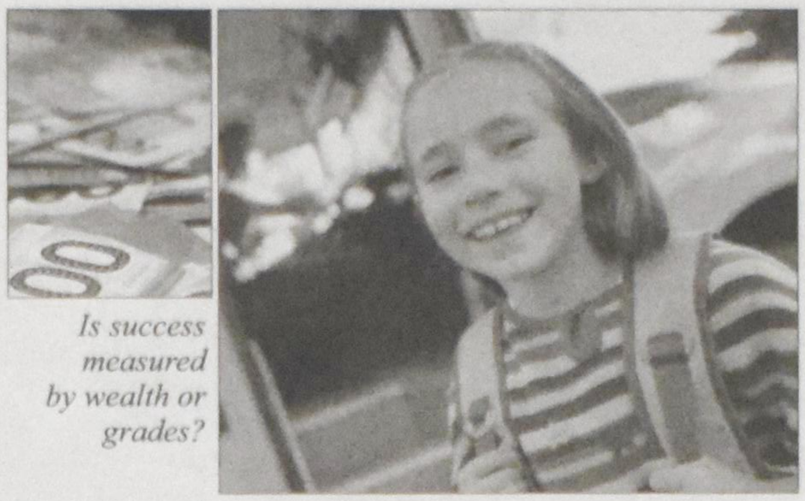
What is success?

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

CC interviewed Karen Gerritsma, 62, presently a part time professor at Redeemer University College, teaching two courses in the Education Department. Karen was principal of Beacon Christian Elementary School, St. Catharines, Ontario, from 1995-2010. She and her husband are blessed with four children who are all married, and six grandchildren.



Is success measured by wealth or grades?

What is success? Is it a biblical or a secular concept?

The biblical concept of success has been so co-opted and warped by our secular culture that, when asked "What is success?", it takes discernment to "un-warp" the secular concept and redeem it back to its biblical intent. We may even need to abandon the term and come up with an alternative one!

Secular ideas of success often focus on an individual's material possessions and power. Success is then objectively measured by how much she has, or to what position he has been elevated. This understanding of success is so imbedded in our culture and our Christian communities that it is difficult to articulate, let alone recognize, a biblical alternative.

My husband and I are presently reading Deuteronomy for our devotions. It is striking that the Lord is always speaking to the community, not individuals, when giving them their norms for successful living before his face in the land flowing with milk and honey – "Worship me as your only God and obey my commands." That highlights one key difference. The biblical view tends to focus on the community and how its members together work out God's plan, while a secular view of success focuses on the individual, and how that individual has been able to rise above the average community member in terms of material possessions and/or position.

Success in our culture is often determined by a particular measuring stick. We say students are successful when they achieve a high percentage on a test, get to go to Master Track and Field Day, or win a speech contest. But let's rethink that from a biblical perspective. A student who has used his academic gifts to the fullest, but received a 70 percent, can be considered successful if a different measuring stick is used. A student who did not win the speech contest, but finally summoned enough courage to get up and speak in front of others, period, is successful if a different measuring stick is used for her. A wealthy businessperson in our church community may be considered successful, but a parishioner who is struggling to keep a part time job may also be considered successful if a different measuring stick is used. That different measuring stick is the very flexible one of how well a particular person or community has developed God-given gifts and used them for God's purposes. That is what makes living in community wonderfully complicated and dynamic, instead of competitive!

Karen, Syl and family. Is success measured by family?

Each one of us is a part of God's story. How does that determine how we view success?

Success is often determined by comparing to a goal. My goal as a Christian is to work out with fear and trembling my role in God's story by serving where I am called. There is a familiar metaphor portraying human beings as actors in "act four" of the creation, fall, redemption biblical drama. We need to find our place in that story, to use our gifts to add new and creative dimensions to that drama, to write our part in "act four" according to the rules set down by the playwright, and to do that while serving in the communities in which we are placed.

How do I know when I am successful at that? A better question may be "How *obedient* have I been at reaching that goal?" Often it is members of our communities who give us clues to the answer to that question by supporting, challenging, encouraging, affirming and discipling us on that stage. As members of a community, we are called to give direction, support and affirmation to the other actors on the stage, and lovingly confront each other if we are on the wrong path.

In your opinion, what can we do to encourage godly success in the lives of our spouses, children, friends and neighbours?

There are three verbs that come to mind: modeling, telling and praying. We are called to model to others in our community how important this biblical story is to us in everything we do: we must always aim to be prayerfully vision-consistent. Inconsistent, hypocritical living confuses and angers others, and more importantly, muddles the biblical message. Referring back to the drama image, it distorts the story line. When we have been unfaithful to the story, we must also model the process of forgiveness in our imperfect relationships – asking for it and offering it, using the Lord as *our* model.

The Lord is continually directing us to tell his story as it is revealed and worked out in our lives. That directive is given over and over again in Deuteronomy, and it needs to be happening in our 21st century communities. We need to be able to testify how the Lord has worked in our lives in concrete ways, whether that was in how he went before us in a health crisis, brought certain words to mind at just the right time, or encouraged us with a beautiful sunset or warbling bird song. We need to tell how we struggle to make our careers and volunteer activities part of the biblical drama, and how we are aiming to be biblically obedient servants. We need to tell our stories of God's faithfulness and promises fulfilled. And just as importantly, we must authentically acknowledge and seek forgiveness for our failures – acknowledge when we fall prey to other gods in our culture, acknowledge when we have damaged relationships in our community, and acknowledge when we do not love our neighbour as ourselves.

Prayer needs to be the environment in which all of our other activities exist. Prayer is interacting, walking and talking with our Leader. We must model that type of prayer life and admit to each other when we shun that relationship and try to go it alone. John Ortberg says, "History belongs to the intercessors" (*The Life You've Always Wanted*, p. 95). What a powerful way to participate in the "act four" drama of history!

As a Christian, what legacy – your life's fruit – do you hope to leave your children, grandchildren and community?

It certainly won't be a legacy of monetary wealth! *Hope* is the humbly operative word here. I hope that they see my life as struggling to be a vision-consistent steward, and trying to make a difference for Christ's sake, whether that is in my calling as a parent or principal, as a wife or council member. I hope they will stand on my shoulders and serve in more obedient and complete ways than I do. I hope that they will be able to see God's fingerprints in creation, including my imperfect life. I hope they understand the valuable gift of time, and that they will be better than I am at using that gift to build relationships, to tell the kingdom story, to model it and to pray for its completion.

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Psalm 23

The Lord leads us by flowing streams
even when our cherished dreams
are battered, shattered
and our hope in life it seems
no longer matters.

Our Shepherd leads us every day
as brooks flow gently on their way
past crags and snags.
More and more we learn to say,
'Lord, have your way'.

Beside such creeks that gently bubble
each time restoring our soul from trouble –
the flowing water,
children's laughter,
music of nature makes us hopeful.

Walking through the valley of shadows,
not knowing each day what follows –
but the Shepherd's hands
leads us as he plans
and gives us grace that mellows.

Our cup brims over with goodness and mercy:
the Lord prepares a table for the hungry and thirsty –
all life long
our thankful song
continues into eternity.

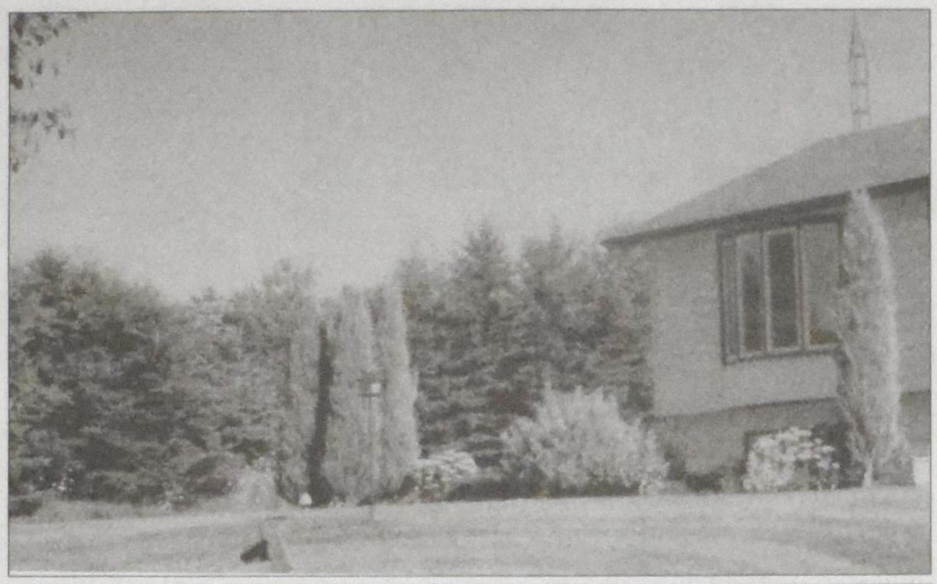
Frank Sawyer teaches philosophy and ethics at Sarospatak Seminary in Hungary. Frank's book, A Way of Seeing, *can be ordered for $12 plus postage by emailing fsawyer777@gmail.com.*

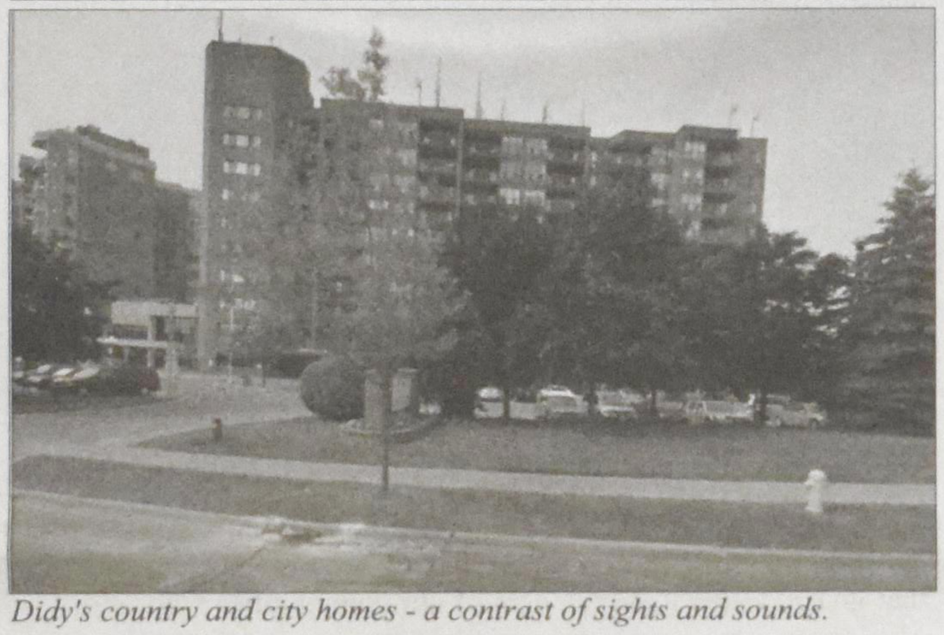
Letting go – new beginnings

Didy Prinzen

It has already been over a year since we moved, but it seems like it was only yesterday. The memories of our house in the country are still fresh in our minds. Living in the midst of God's creation and experiencing its elements all around us was a joy that we will not soon forget. From early spring through summer and right into the fall, we would have our breaks behind our house in the morning and out in front in the afternoon.

What sights and sounds there were to behold! In spring we would see the lawn in front of us grow greener every day. The symphony of spring would begin with the sight of the first robin. We watched the tulips that we had planted come up and saw them grow taller day by day. All kinds of birds were feeding at the feeder right in front of where we sat. We got to know many of them. Aggressive ones, like the noisy blue jay in the spring, whose shrieking we already had heard in the house. But what a beautiful bird! The jays would first sit in the trees before charging for the feeder, chasing other birds away. The smaller bashful birds would wait patiently for their turn from a distance. There were the sweet and peaceful mourning doves - too corpulent to get on the feeder but strolling on the lawn, pecking seed from underneath it. Very early in the spring we had already heard their mournful cooing and had seen them courting on our garage roof while we were having breakfast.





Didy's country and city homes - a contrast of sights and sounds.

There were rabbits to watch. They chose our lawn to nibble and to frolic. They would escape from the animal zoo beside our house, looking for a more peaceful place. Peacocks came to our yard for the same reason. While the rabbits dug their way underneath the fence, the peacocks simply flew over it and would strut around our house, very conscious of their grandeur. The zoo next to our place was an advantage for our family. We were given a free unlimited pass and could take our grandchildren there whenever we wished.

In the spring and early summer, every day at the same time, a mother duck would waddle across the lawn on her way to the creek, a trail of little ducklings behind her. In late afternoon we saw them on their way back. Mother duck would stand by the driveway and wait until all of her offspring were neatly lined up again before she crossed.

Sometimes we were forced inside when, after a particularly dry period, a thunderstorm was threatening. We watched the ominous clouds and the lightning from the window and saw the wind whipping the trees and driving sheets of rain across the lawn and driveway. It was an awesome sight! When the rain stopped, we smelled the wonderful aroma of the drenched earth.

In wintertime the snow would come and would lay on the many evergreens around our house, turning the outside into a winter wonderland. Such was our life in the country.

Transitions

Now we are living eight storeys high in a home for seniors. It's been quite a change.

Our view offers stores and more stores, eating establishments, subdivisions and city streets. Instead of the pleasant sounds of animals in nature, we now hear traffic and the occasional alarming sound of an ambulance or a fire truck. When we sit outside, it's on our cement balcony. Instead of watching birds, we watch who does and doesn't stop at the stop sign.

However – we try to focus on the pleasant things there are for us to see in the city, too.

In summertime the houses below are interspersed with the green of trees. The grounds of our building display an abundance of flowers. We watch the school bus stop and all the moms and dads meeting their children and walking them home. It is still a great thrill to see Lake Ontario, as we could from our house too, far beyond the city. On a clear day the blue on the horizon is beautiful.

We can hear the pleasant chuck-chuck of a freight train and see it wind along the tracks through the fields to the far right of us. We are unable to see the sun set anymore, living on the east side of our building, but we can watch it rise. In late afternoon or evening, we see the city at our feet illuminated by the sinking sun. Then, when it gets dark, thousands of lights take over. I like to think that they lessen the night-time loneliness somewhat of the people who have lost their spouses and are living here alone.

Even though we miss the sight of stars that shone so brilliantly in the country at night, on one of the first nights in our new place we saw a large wonderful moon brightly suspended against the blackness of our living room window. Some evenings it is a big orange ball slowly rising from the horizon. In the daytime we see the same cloud formations that used to fill me with wonder on my walks in the country.

Many gains

Despite what we miss, those rural scenes in nature that brought us much happiness and a sense of closeness to our Creator, we still feel blessed in our eight-storey high apartment. For there are many gains.

We feel it a blessing that we live in a Christian home for seniors and that our fellow-occupants are, for the most part, people of our own faith and our own generation. When we lived in the country, we hardly got out at night. Now there are many events that we can attend right here in our new home, without having to put on a coat and start up a car. There are concerts given in the auditorium, with organ and piano and other instruments. There is a church service every other Sunday afternoon. There are fancy dinners at Christmas, on Valentine's Day, and on other occasions. There are movies and sing-a-longs and all kinds of programs aimed at making life easier for seniors. You can have your pick.

Moving into a seniors' home is a challenge both physically and emotionally. When the time came for us to make that decision, however, we found it gave way to new blessings. One of the best is the spiritual blessing of rejoicing in the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ with fellow believers in music and in song.

Memories of our life at the house have become treasures of the heart.

Didy Prinzen lives in Whitby, Ontario and is a member of Hebron CRC. She has contributed stories and poetry to Christian Courier *for many years.*

Train ride home

Wise-cracking stewards
and amiable travellers
see
birds in flight,
islands in lakes,
bear cubs in trees,
an eagle high above,
lily pad-filled ponds,
hay bales in the fields,
trees pointing to the sky,
reeds standing in swamps and
antiques behind forgotten sheds
while surveying gently rolling farmland,
curving around water's shores,
hugging mountain cliffs and
passing freight trains
as parallel steel rails lead the way.

Stanley J. Groothof is a husband, dad, friend, and pastor in Telkwa, BC. He blogs at 4thpoint.wordpress.com.

Features

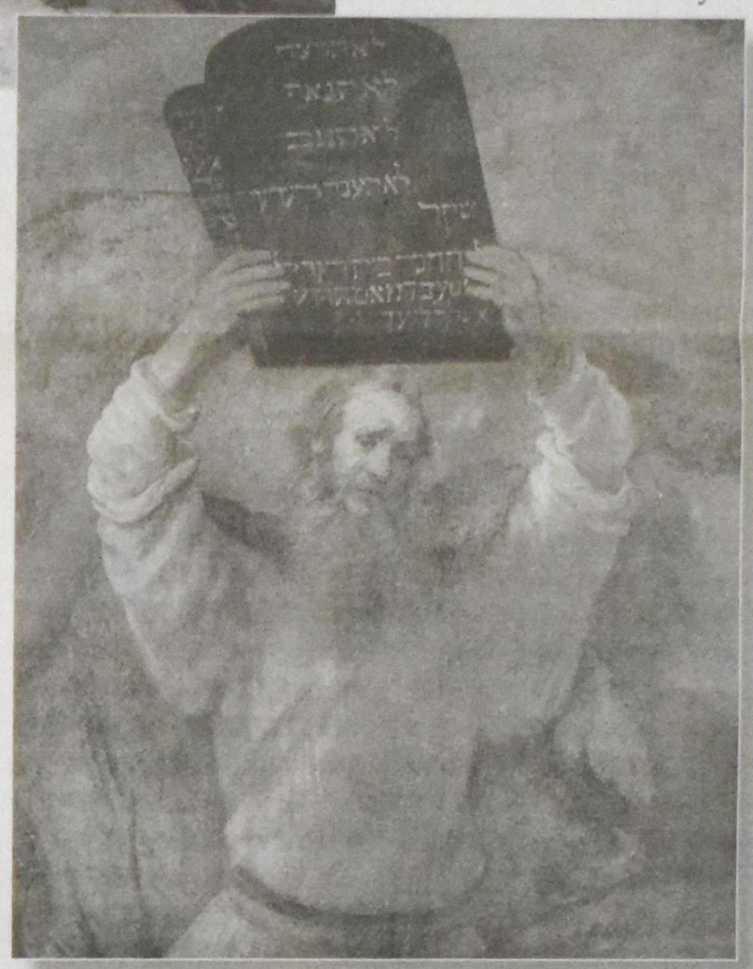
A sense of calling

Liz Kraan

Calling: a strong inner impulse toward a particular course of action especially when accompanied by conviction of divine influence (Merriam-Webster).

Gift: a notable capacity, talent, or endowment (Merriam Webster).

How often do we confuse *calling* with *gifting*? God doesn't make that error though, much to the surprise, and even chagrin, of his people. A casual walk through Scripture shows God calling and expecting obedience from a varied collection of people. In Genesis we see God calling out Abram, promising to make him into a "great nation" through his barren wife Sarai. God calls the spoiled and cosseted Joseph out of his dream-world into the reality of saving his family, and the surrounding nations, through his administrative abilities. Moses, the baby who was not permitted to have a voice, is called to meet with Pharaoh and demand the release of God's own people; and this after a misled sense of calling some 40 years earlier had resulted in the death of an Egyptian and the derision of the people he was seeking to save. That effort left him running for his life – not an inspired beginning. And when does Moses receive his God-given calling? At no less than the tender age of 80! When most people might have been thinking about retirement, Moses was signed on to a 40-year contract. Then, to really complicate his life, he ended up leading God's people for 40 years in the desert as all his contemporaries died off! By the time of Canaan's conquest, simple arithmetic tells us that except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses, there was no one left over the age of 60. Moses was 120 years old – do we need to say generation gap?



Top: Moses rescued from the Nile, *1638, by Nicolas Poussin. Right:* Moses with the tablets of the Ten Commandments, *painting by Rembrandt (1659).*

God's strange choices

Throughout the Old Testament, we see God calling some of the most unlikely characters to lead his people. Cowardly Gideon, threshing his grain in a cave, is called to conquer the oppressors with a miniscule army of 300. David, the youngest son, consigned to the menial role of shepherd boy, is called to be a warrior king. Amos had been a farmer in Tekoa before being called to be a prophet. On the other hand, Jonah, a successful Israelite prophet, is called out to preach repentance to Israel's neighbour. Hosea is called to marry an unfaithful woman, build a family with her and then take her back again after she proves to be once more unfaithful – a terribly unappealing prospect.

In the New Testament, God does not necessarily choose the people that we would have interviewed for their positions, either. He calls on a young and inexperienced virgin to bear and raise his own son, our Saviour. Joseph is told in a dream to stop being squeamish about the fact that Mary is pregnant with a child that is not his, and through a command to name the baby – a father's task – is called to be a father to him. Throughout his ministry on earth, Jesus calls on fishermen, sceptics and tax-collectors to be his followers. He appoints loud-mouthed, impulsive Peter to lead the church even after his crushing denials of being acquainted with Jesus at the home of the high priest. In a bold move that frightens the early church, God calls Saul, the number one persecutor of the church, a Pharisee of Pharisees, to lead his church, and spread the good news of the gospel into Gentile territory. The transformation is so complete that even Saul's name gets changed – to Paul. And that is the Bible: example after example of God calling on the most unlikely people to do his work. Nor is that the most important aspect of God's calling. The common thread that runs through the whole narrative of the Bible, and hopefully our own lives, is the *provision* that God makes for those he chooses, also for us when he calls us out of our comfort zones and out of our own ideas about where our gifts lie.

Wouldn't it be so much more efficient for God to call people who are gifted in certain areas to serve in those areas? Wouldn't there be fewer mistakes, the church running like a well-oiled machine to the glory of God?

Maybe.

Maybe not.

Where would our sense of God's providence be in our own lives if we only did the easy jobs – the jobs that we felt like doing? Wouldn't we be tempted to let the same people do the same jobs repeatedly because they're **gifted** in that area? That could lead to fatigue, burn-out and the sense that we have become one-dimensional. In fact, this does happen when we consider people's gifts to be more important than their calling.

Looking back at the examples from the Bible, we see that God not only gives barren Sarai a child, but he does so long after she has given up any realistic hope of pregnancy. God raises Joseph up from the status of prisoner to that of Pharaoh's second-in-command, also giving him a forgiving heart and a sense of the bigger picture. Moses is given his brother Aaron as a mouth-piece, though there were times later when Moses must have wondered at the wisdom of giving Aaron any leadership role at all. Even at the end of his days, Moses is physically fit and bright-eyed, surely a gift from God. Gideon receives a very clear understanding that it is God who has given him the victory, knowing that a force of 300 is no match against the superior forces of the enemy. David, the youngest and least-impressive of Jesse's sons, becomes the greatest King of Israel and a man after God's own heart, in spite of his wandering eye and his inability to effectively parent his own children. Jonah learns about how big God's heart is, though he whines and grumbles till the end. Joseph, whose only descriptor is "righteous" – not a word that implies a nurturing character – not only marries Mary, but continues to listen to God and take responsibility for his family. He whisks Mary and Jesus away into Egypt when Herod tries to destroy his infant rival. Then there's Paul, who out of hatred and self-righteousness sought to kill the followers of Jesus, but who is transformed to write the divinely inspired words of 1 Corinthians 13, the famous chapter on love.

God chooses us

At the end of the day, what is the question, really? Is the question "What are your gifts?" or is the question "What is your calling?" Is it possible that we have used our ideas about "giftedness" to become self-centered? Are we more in tune with ourselves than we are with God? Have our ideas about community changed from "each one for everyone" to "everyone for me"?

Summer is traditionally a transition time in our congregations – elections or appointments for church councils have taken place, our ministries and programs are on hiatus, and people take a breather from the busyness of work and school to focus on other things in life. Perhaps during this break, God is calling on you to do a new thing – something that you might never have considered before. Will you dismiss the promptings of the Holy Spirit, or will you take on a new challenge, knowing that if God is calling you, he is also equipping you to do his work?

I have been called, at this time, to take on the task of deacon in our local congregation. Part of my job is to show mercy, and there are others who are more naturally merciful than I; part of my calling is to encourage and there are people in our congregation who are much better encouragers than I; part of my role is to be an example of good stewardship and surely there are others who are more stewardly of God's creation and its resources than I. But that is not the point. God has called me to be a deacon, and so I will rely on him to make me more merciful, more encouraging and a better steward than I have been in the past. And it is through God's work in my selfish little spirit – stretching it, growing it and maturing it – that the resulting fruit will emerge and help build the community of believers for his glory.

So, what is God calling you to do?

Liz and her family attend Collingwood Christian Reformed Church. She is a teacher and recently elected deacon who enjoys thinking and writing.

Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

Back to work!

Summer is my favourite season. I love the riot of colours in flowerbeds and ditches, sultry afternoons and radiant sunsets. I love the song of birds in the morning, the scent of ripening wheat fields and warm evenings when daylight gives way to stars twinkling in a black velvet sky. From June's strawberries to juicy red tomatoes in August, my father-in-law's garden provides fresh bounty for the table all summer long. What's not to love?

To be sure, summer brings extra work of its own, whether in the yard or the fields. But I confess that I give myself lots of time off in the summer – when it's simply "too hot" or "too nice" to spend the day working. I justify my prolific laziness by remembering that summer is only a short season in this part of the world. The dark days of winter will inspire more industrious behaviour in due time.

So Labour Day has always been a bittersweet holiday for me. According to the calendar, autumn begins on September 23. As far as I'm concerned, Labour Day marks the beginning of the end of summer. I need to get back to the regular routine and rhythm of work, no longer indulging in leisurely afternoons by the pool or spontaneous motorbike rides "just because." That's fine. If it were always summer I would either learn to work through the heat or turn into a professional sloth.

Don't get me wrong – I enjoy work and genuinely admire those who labour diligently. My parents passed on their strong Protestant work ethic long ago.

My father, a hardworking Stelco man, rose every morning at 5:30. If I dared to loaf in bed after 8:00 a.m. on the weekends, he would burst loudly into my bedroom. In his best Sergeant Schultz voice he would bellow, "*Aufstehen! Raus! Raus!* Everybody OUT of bed!" He didn't have to work on the German accent. It came naturally.

Things changed the summer I turned 14. I started working at the small restaurant where my mother was a cook. I was only supposed to clean tables and wash dishes, but then the waitress on duty went home for an emergency. A few minutes later a busload of senior citizens arrived. Suddenly we were hopping.

The owner, Mr. Biehn, handled the kitchen and my mother came out to serve tables with me. For all the arguing we did at home, we now worked compatibly side by side. At the end of the shift she practically beamed with pride when the boss offered me a full-time summer position.

One Saturday morning I lay in bed after working an evening shift the night before. I heard my father's footsteps in the hallway and braced myself for the impending Hogan's Heroes spiel. To my surprise I heard him talking to my mother. "She worked late last night, didn't she?" he said. "Guess we'd better let her sleep."

I don't know what I enjoyed more that morning – the extra hour of rest or the newly earned respect from my parents.

Created for this

When I became a Christian I learned another reason to appreciate work – it's ordained by God. From Genesis to Revelation I see that God is a worker himself, and that he commands us to be productive as his children.

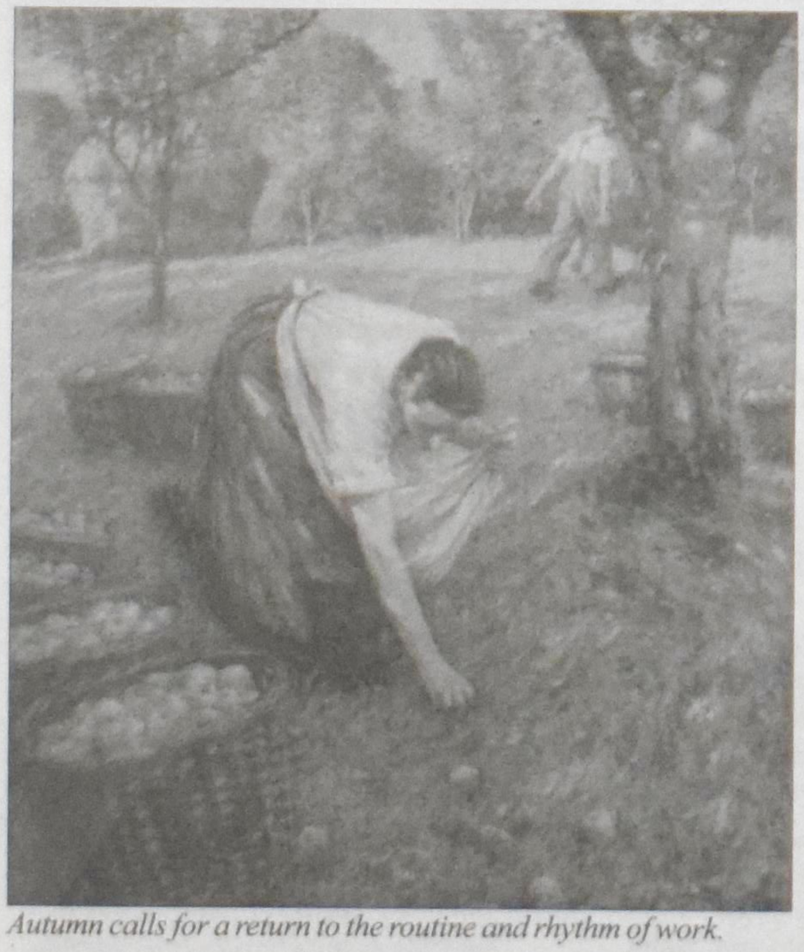
The ancient Greeks believed the gods despised humanity and therefore condemned us to work. This fit well with their dichotomy of flesh (being evil) versus spirit (being good). Cooking, cleaning and caretaking were jobs suitable only for slaves. That freed the intellectuals to pursue important matters like art, philosophy or politics.

Christians understand that work is good, although the nature of work changed after the fall. Now futility tinges fulfillment and even the most faithful service is subject to some frustration. Nevertheless, we remain called to work at whatever we do "with all your heart, as working for the Lord. . . . It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:23).

Not much of my work these days is glamorous (OK, none of it is.) But I find satisfaction in knowing that whether it's dusting furniture, paying bills or scraping manure off the barn floors, it's what God has given me to do. To quote William Tyndale, "If we look externally, there is a difference between washing the dishes and preaching the word of God. But as touching to please God, there is no difference at all."

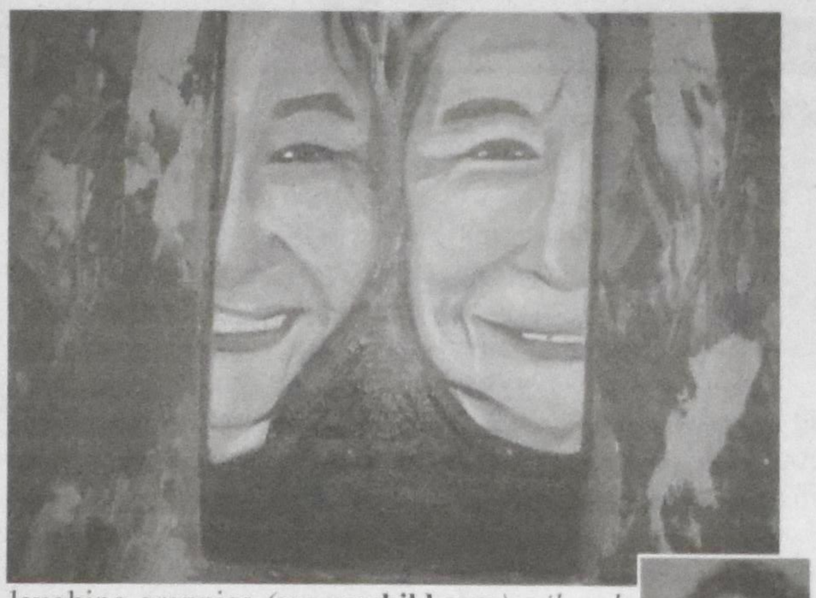
Here's to God's gift of work and the strength to do it. (And to the occasional afternoon in the pool before the weather gets cold.)

Heidi Vander Slikke (hmvanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ont.



Autumn calls for a return to the routine and rhythm of work.

Artful Eye



laughing grannies *(**canvaschild.com**), oil and acrylic by Emily Wierenga.*

Emily is a writer and artist from Neerlandia, AB, where she lives with her husband Trent and their two children.

Conquering a new continent

When you begin to see yourself
in Chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes
with a tremble and stoop,
dimmed eyesight
and insomnia at the faint light of dawn
as birds begin singing songs
you cannot hear,

When the muscles and strength
that defined you
now betray you,

Remember the resilient
'who you really are',
still abounds with a robust
wealth of experience,
compassionate heart,
and the courage
to take on the aging process
like a pioneer conquering
a new continent.

Linda Siebenga

Linda Siebenga (siebenga@cciwireless.ca) is a poet from Central Alberta with three published volumes of poetry. Her most recent work is Earth Against Your Cheek. *Her website can be found at www.inscribe.org under Members.*

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Columns

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Heading off to university

This spring, our oldest son graduated from Hamilton District Christian High School, exactly 50 years after his grandfather graduated from the same school. As parents, the high-school years have passed quickly. I recall the advice we received from veteran parents when we had our first child: "Enjoy it while they're young; before you know it, they'll be grown up." This unsolicited advice sounded ridiculous then, but the time stretching from diapers to driving lessons has flown.

Our son has now headed off to Redeemer University College, and – for the record – it was by his own choosing. As a professor at Redeemer I was careful not to apply undue pressure; I encouraged my son to visit several university campuses and explore all the possibilities. To be sure, we are pleased with his choice.

Our son is interested mostly in the social sciences, not the technical sciences like his dad. In fact, none of my children have taken a keen interest in technical pursuits, but this does not bother me. In the end, what I want most for my children is for each one to become the person God has made him or her to be.

But there can be a tension here – what parent has not worried about their child post-graduation, especially if they choose to major in Elizabethan poetry, Latin or art history? On the flip side, there are those who choose professional programs for the promise of a lucrative career, and end up restless and disenchanted with their work. Our advice to our son has been to explore his God-given passions in his chosen discipline of study, while at the same time thinking about pathways to practical work and service. My advice is the same to all my students: identify your gifts, study diligently and trust that God will provide a place for you to serve.

Worldview ingredients

A young Greek student named Dioscorus once wrote to St. Augustine with many philosophical and scholarly questions. Augustine wrote back to remind this young student that mastering academics should not be an end unto itself. Augustine challenged the student to think about how his studies contributed to his end as a young Christian. In the end, people need to be attracted by your way of life, not your academic prowess. I think Redeemer's original tagline, "Learning is for Serving," captures this notion as well.

I attended a public university to study engineering, a pathway chosen by many Christian students. I encountered the typical challenges, such as balancing finances and maintaining a good diet (I confess I ate far too much Kraft Dinner). I also found my first months living in the dorms at a secular university to be somewhat of a culture shock. The transition from Christian high school to public university was a sharp one, not only academically but also spiritually. Young Christians on secular campuses face more issues than just managing money, eating well and getting enough sleep. According to the political scientists Robert Putnam and David Campbell, "young Americans are dropping out of religion at an alarming rate of five to six times the historical rate (30 to 40 percent have no religion today, versus 5 to 10 percent a generation ago)." At university I encountered a worldview based on a trust in technology and the notion that authentic knowledge was technical and scientific in nature. A Christian fellowship group on campus provided me with a community of believers who could encourage and support me through my university years.

In his book *The Fabric of Faithfulness*, Steven Garber explores belief and behaviour during the university years. He asserts that during the critical years of university, students need to develop a worldview that can make sense of life, have relationships with mentors who incarnate that worldview, and journey together with others embedded in the same worldview. Wherever students choose to study, these are important ingredients in the university years. We gave our son a copy of the book *Making College Count* by Derek Melleby; it is a delightful little book full of sage advice about following Jesus during the critical college years.

The university years figured prominently in the direction of my life and career; I expect they will for our son as well. University provides a unique time for growth and discovery as young people head into adulthood. It is a critical time during which faith and moral meaning are formed. Perhaps you know a student headed for university this fall. Remember to pray for him or her –and for their parents, too.

Derek Schuurman (dschuurman@cs.redeemer.ca) is a professor at Redeemer University College and a father to four children, one of whom is starting university this fall.

Patchwork Words

Melissa Kuipers

Where do Christian singles meet?

I've been told many times, "It'll happen when you least expect it." The people who say this mean well, but seem to think that finding someone to love and spend the rest of my life with will occur pretty much by accident. One of my single friends jokes about the irony of madly attempting to "wait for the one" and "stop expecting" in order to convince God that she is ready for the right person to waltz into her life.

There are few other areas in which we apply this kind of passivity. If I tell my friends and family I'm just waiting for the right job to come along, I won't be greeted with the same kind of support. Rather, I'd be expected to get my resume in order, comb through job sites, and turn in as many applications as possible. In other words, I'd be expected to take an active approach to the process. One single friend of mine gave the analogy that "waiting for the one" to come along and sweep you off your feet is like holding your glass in the air and waiting for it to fill with water.

My sense is that the older we get, the more difficult dating becomes, particularly after university when many of us find ourselves in steady careers. How, then, do Christian singles meet? The following are a few possible ideas. While these suggestions might take some initiative and creativity, these are a few of the ways in which people I know have successfully met their significant others.

Singles groups

A healthy and supportive singles group is not only a place for people to find a date, but an opportunity to connect with others in the same place of life. A close friend of mine whose community is mostly composed of married people recently joined a Christian singles group and found it extremely refreshing, not for the dating prospects it gave her but for the opportunity to share the joys and challenges of singleness with others who could easily relate.

Blind dates and set ups

When I was teaching at a small-town Christian school, several of my co-workers offered to set me up on blind dates. While none of these offers ever developed into anything substantial, I appreciated the gestures. These were not friends pushing men my way because they saw me as desperate, but rather people who knew someone they felt had a lot in common with me, someone I probably would never have had the opportunity to get to know without a mediating connection.

I've known others who have complained that they've hinted to friends about wanting to meet someone, but don't feel comfortable asking for a set-up outright. That said, some people are uncomfortable with blind dates and set ups, and for good reasons. I have a friend who avoided interacting with his future wife for several months because he was resistant to the pressure created by his church community who, with kind motives, kept pushing them to date.

Trying to support single friends by connecting them with others shouldn't be done under the premise that people are happier or more fulfilled when married. Any attempt at "setting people up" should not replace the support we should give to those who have chosen a life of singleness, or who have found themselves single by circumstance rather than choice. Most people are not offended by a friendly, "I know someone who has a lot in common with you – would you be interested in meeting?" A gentle suggestion can be easily turned down or accepted without any awkwardness.

Online dating

I have a number of friends who have met their spouses online and are wonderfully suited for each other. I've heard from others who are not yet married but have found online dating to be a positive experience because it's encouraging to suddenly have a variety of potential people to connect with and potentially date.

Shared interests

Finally, volunteering, playing sports and getting involved in artistic and community activities are all ways to meet other people. Finding ways to express our interests and passions is an important part of being a confident and well-rounded person, and this should be our motivation rather than meeting potential dating partners. Of course, the confidence and contentment acquired by pursuing our interests puts us in a healthier place for pursuing dating relationships in the first place.

However Christian singles ultimately choose to deal with dating, we need to do so from a place of satisfaction in life and comfort in our own company. The longing for a spouse is healthy and natural, but is just one aspect of our humanity. It's only when we are confident and whole that we are able to truly get to know another person for who she or he is and journey together in a relationship.

Melissa Kuipers (mckuip@gmail.com) is a full-time student completing her Masters of Arts in Creative Writing at the University of Toronto.

Columns

The Public Square
Harry Antonides

The (White) House the media built

Many Americans must still be scratching their heads, wondering how it was that Barack Obama, an unknown academic turned community organizer and then Senator from Illinois, managed to capture the first prize of American politics, President of the most powerful nation in the world. Undoubtedly, Obama's victory had to do with his eloquence, political savvy, energy and boundless ambition. But while these characteristics would have brought him far, they wouldn't in themselves have been sufficient to defeat his competitors in the Democratic Party and carry him to victory in the 2008 election. The decisive factor in Obama's rise to the presidency, then, was the role of the mainstream media in American politics.

Bernard Goldberg spent 28 years as a correspondent with CBS News, and has been an outspoken critic of systemic bias in the mainstream media. According to Goldberg, the media has changed from being an impartial observer to an unapologetic advocate of mostly left-wing causes. Goldberg suggests that this transformation is a threat to the integrity of the media, and an impediment to public confidence and the health of a free society. His 2001 book, *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*, won Goldberg no plaudits from his colleagues, many of whom considered him a traitor, but became a *New York Times* #1 best seller.

Obama Crowned King

The media often portrayed Obama in glowing terms.

In 2009, Goldberg published *A Slobbering Love Affair: The True (and Pathetic) Story of the Torrid Romance between Barack Obama and the Mainstream Media*. The title tells you everything you need to know about the theme of this book. Goldberg refers to a number of studies that expose a lack of fairness in the media, and suggests an obvious double standard in reporting about Democrats versus Republicans. But his main argument is that the media helped Obama by mostly writing glowing stories about his performance and his crowd-inspiring speeches.

Veteran reporters like Chris Matthews of MSNBC Hardball were reduced to making the most embarrassing and juvenile claims about their hero Obama. Many will remember Matthews's comment about the thrill going up his leg when listening to Obama. Evan Thomas, editor of *Newsweek*, raised flattery to a new level when he praised Obama's June 2009 Cairo speech as follows: "I mean in a way Obama's standing above the country, above – above the world, he's sort of God." MSNBC Keith Olbermann had this to say about Obama's famous Invesco Field speech: "For 42 minutes not a sour note, and spellbinding throughout in a way usually reserved for the creation of fiction." Olbermann intended to praise Obama, but in an odd sort of way, he spoke the truth when he referred to the "creation of fiction."

Putting a glow on Obama's every utterance was bad enough, but the most important way in which the media became an apologist for Obama was to shield him from damaging information. This happened when some critics who had not fallen for the Obama adoration syndrome took a hard look at his previous relations with some shady characters from the hard Left, people including Bill Ayres (an unrepentant 1960s radical and bomber), Jeremiah Wright (the controversial preacher at the church Obama attended for 20 years) and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (a left-leaning network of advocacy groups whose government funding was revoked in 2009 after allegations of corruption and fraud). The complete list of Obama's radical affiliations is much longer – see Stanley Kurtz's *Radical-in-Chief*.

Damage Control

If anyone were to mention these connections, Obama and his staff would shrug them off by saying that relations with these people and organizations were only incidental and of no consequence. This looked like it might change, however, when the story about the real Jeremiah Wright broke in February 2007, not in the mainstream press but in *Rolling Stone*. This coincided with the distribution of Wright's most outlandish and racially-charged sermons. But rather than condemn Obama's affiliation with Wright, the media, led by the *New York Times*, swung into action to minimize the damage. The spin masters were so effective that they managed to turn the tables on anyone who wanted to pursue this story by smearing them as hatemongers and racists.

Goldberg does a masterful job shining the light of truth on the duplicity of the mainstream media that abetted Obama in covering up information about his past associations with left-wing radicals. Obama has made it very clear that he wants to bring about a fundamental change in America. If you want to know what he has in mind, read Goldberg's book. Goldberg writes with a quiet passion because he is convinced that the new advocacy role of the media is not only its undoing, but also a threat to society at large. Worst of all, the media is doing immense harm to the freedom that is indispensable for a healthy and thriving democracy. In my opinion, this book should be required reading at the high school level and beyond. Thank you, Mr. Goldberg.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ont.

Country Living
Meindert Vander Galien

Celebrity milking competitions

Celebrity milking competitions are popular at agricultural fairs across North America. They're fun and fundraising events in which mostly urban folks watch people-in-the-news try their hand at milking a submissive dairy cow.

I should get a kick out of these competitions, but it's actually quite depressing that the art of hand milking has gone to the clowns. Celebrity milking competitions are udderly (utterly) silly because they give the public a false picture of milking. You can't just plunk a pail on the ground between a cow's leg and hunch down beside her pulling one teat at a time. That's not how it's done! Milking isn't for the inexperienced, and the docile bovines at milking competitions are not your average dairy cows. They are used to being hand milked and probably won't lift a foot.

If these competitions were serious about showing hand milking skills, they would give a little demonstration how it's done and get a milk stool so folks wouldn't have to kneel down on one knee. Most dairy cows will kick backwards as well as sideways if you monkey around or set a pail between their legs. When I was a youngster we milked our cows by hand, but we always tied their legs (*spannen* in Dutch) with a braided rope made from baler twine. A week or so before our first-calf heifers calved, dad would start training the heifers by putting a rope around their legs and let them stand with it on for a few minutes. From the time they calved and were first milked and through the rest of their lives as dairy cows, they had a rope around their legs while they were being milked. It was a safety precaution. When we got a milking machine and later pipeline milking, tying the legs wasn't necessary anymore as we were not sitting in harm's way.

Of the numerous milking competition pictures I've looked at in recent years, only a few people have exhibited any real skill as hand milkers. They are the ones who sit close to the cow and have their head in the cow's thick flank – above the udder. That's good because it gives some control over the cow's leg. But these same milkers tend to have their leg (and knee) out and away from the cow's leg. Not good. Place the knees in front of the cow's and hold the milk pail up between your knees. This way the milk pail is sitting up safe and you won't have the chance that milk hits the cow's leg or hoof. She won't like that.

Don't hold a pail through the legs

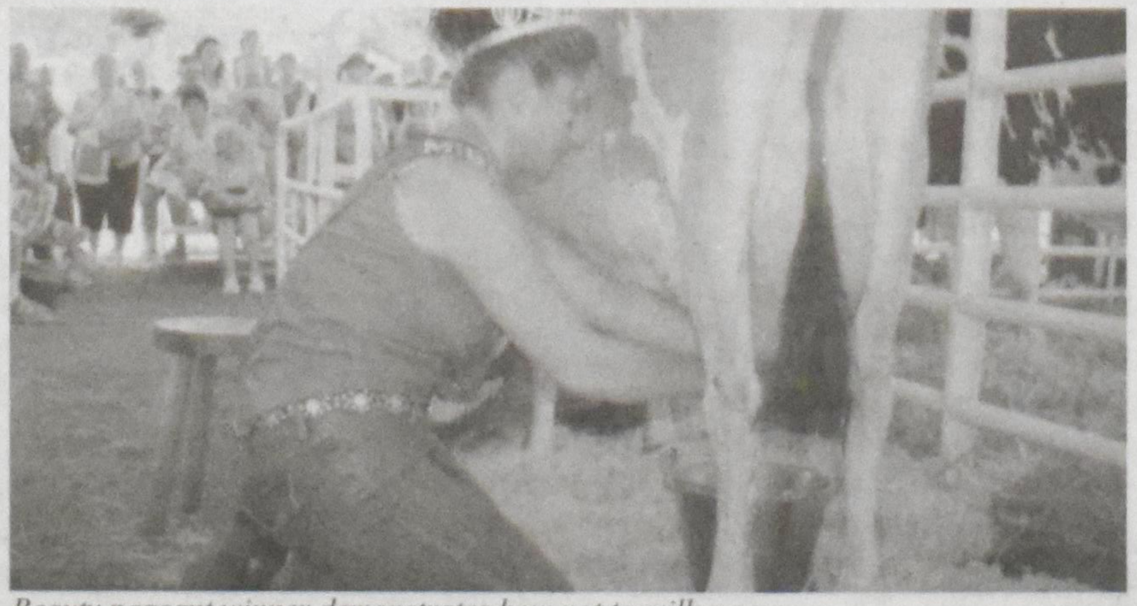
I recently saw an Ottawa Citizen photo of a milking competition held at the New York State Fair. As usual, a man wearing running shoes and sitting on one knee milks with one hand squirting into a pail directly in front of the cow's leg.

There were also pictures of the competitors at an Ottawa event holding a tiny or normal sized pail under the udder with one hand and pulling a teat with the other. One was a scary photo of two young women milking in which one held the pail through the back legs while the other bent down pulling one teat. With a normal dairy cow, this is almost a sure way to get kicked. Another picture showed a brave milker using both hands but milking the wrong set of teats.

While some celebrities at the competition pulled 70 ml at most, others barely got a trace of milk. Laureen Harper, the prime minister's wife, has been a winner a few times and is shown in one photo with a little milk in the bottom of a pail. I can't see foam. My father always said you need foam on the milk or you don't know how to milk. To get foam you have to squirt long, thick and steady streams of milk.

My father should know. He could milk the tiny teats of heifers using his thumb and one finger and still have foam in the pail.

Meindert van der Galien is a retired dairy farmer in eastern Ont. He knows you need strong hands if you want to milk a cow the old-fashioned way.



Beauty pageant winner demonstrates how not to milk a cow.

Remembering Jack Layton

Brian Walsh

During the last full week of August we witnessed a national outpouring of emotion the likes of which is unparalleled in my lifetime. Canadians from across the country have expressed their grief and sorrow, indeed, their deep sense of national loss, at the death of the Honourable Jack Layton.

The story of Jack's (and everyone called him Jack) political success in the last federal election will go down in the history books as one of the most remarkable moments in Canadian political history. Over three elections Jack led the New Democratic Party (NDP) from a distant fourth place and 13 seats in the House to a remarkable 103 seats and official Opposition status in the last federal election. The fact that most of these seats came at the expense of the Bloc Quebecois in Quebec has perhaps turned the tide on separatism for years to come.

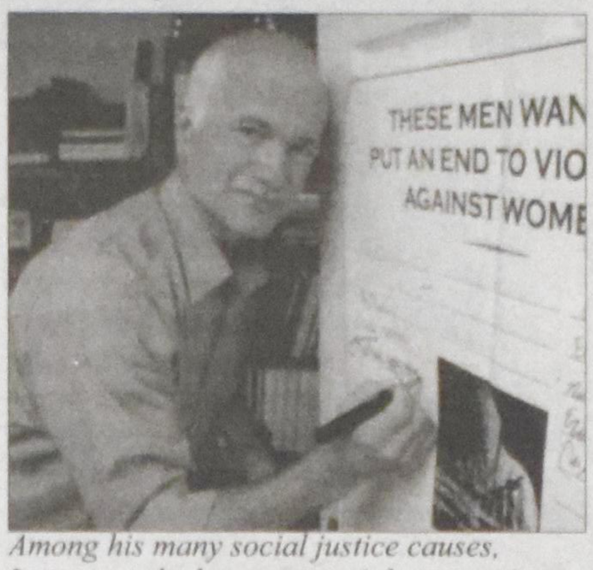
So there was something very poignant about this man's death. He was moving politics in a different direction in this county, the first social democrat to come so close to the Prime Minister's office. He was a very likeable man, incredibly down to earth and he was winning new seats for his party.

Or perhaps it was the fact that the whole nation watched Jack fight a federal election while undergoing treatment for prostate cancer and recovering from a recent hip surgery. There is something compelling about a man with a cane running up the steps to yet another podium for yet another speech. And now, so soon after his success, he has succumbed to yet another cancer. Dead at the age of 61.

All of this is enough to occasion some widespread sympathy and grief across the country, whether you voted for the NDP or not.

But there is something more going on here. The right wing pundits don't get it and are clearly disturbed and cynical in the face of all of the emotion and media attention. Some are suggesting that the whole thing is little more than mass hysteria and political theatre. These folks, and there are a lot of Evangelical Christians amongst them, can't really understand why a social democrat who would raise taxes for the rich, advocate negotiations with the Taliban in Afghanistan, push Canada to honour its Kyoto commitments and support gay marriage and minority rights could occasion such a vast and overwhelming response by his death.

So why did thousands upon thousands of Canadians come out to sign books of condolence, fill the public square in front of Toronto City Hall with chalk messages, and stand in line for hours to pay their respects when Jack laid in state on Parliament Hill and in repose at Toronto City Hall? Why such an overwhelming show of emotion?



Among his many social justice causes, Layton worked to prevent violence against women.

Yearning for good

In his wonderful eulogy at Jack's funeral, Stephen Lewis began to get at the source of this response. He said that Jack "tapped into a yearning, sometimes ephemeral, rarely articulated, a yearning that politics be conducted in a different way, and from that difference would emerge a better Canada." This was a politics of civility, Lewis said, and of generosity.

A yearning for civility and generosity. We might say a yearning for neighbourliness. A yearning for the common good.

I think this begins to get at what is going on here. In the face of a politics of self-centred individualism which will destroy the social and ecological fabric of our nation, Jack stood for the common good. The common good – something fundamentally unimaginable to the neo-liberal economic agenda of our day. Generosity – of spirit and of resources – in a world fixated on scarcity and self-interest.

Yes, that is something of what is going on here. In Jack, and symbolically in his death, a yearning for the common good, for generosity, for justice was reawakened. It is almost as if this had been so buried, so covered over in our economic anxiety, our fixation with security, and fear, that we had forgotten, or repressed those yearnings. But there they were. Mixed with our tears as we saw that coffin draped in the Canadian flag, as we said goodbye to a man who died at what Lewis called "the pinnacle of his political career."

But, you know, I think there is something even deeper than this yearning going on. Or perhaps it is just another way to get at this yearning.

Jack's pastor, Rev. Brent Hawkes, told the community gathered at the funeral that Jack never wore his spirituality on his sleeve. His was a deeply ecumenical and inclusive faith. But he never talked about it. In his last days, Jack said to Rev. Hawkes, "Brent, I believe how I live my life everyday is my act of worship."

Everyday life as an act of worship.

Everyday life acting out of the belief that we should indeed love our neighbours as ourselves.

Everyday life – on the street, in the House of Commons, in the committee meeting, at the local market – loving his neighbour.

That was Jack Layton.

And maybe that is what reawakened such a deep yearning in the country. A yearning for the radically hospitable and generous way of life found in loving our neighbours. A yearning for the delightfully restorative power of justice in our lives. A yearning for that kind of everyday worship.

Jesus for Prime Minister

During the last federal election a group of us ran a series of blogs at empireremixed.com under the playful title, "Jesus for Prime Minister."

Jack Layton is not Jesus. But I'm convinced that he knew Jesus quite well.

You see, Jesus was homeless and Jack found him shelter and advocated tirelessly for a just housing policy in this country. He led the Federation of Canadian Municipalities to declare homelessness as a national disaster and advocated that one percent of the federal budget be directed to eradicating homelessness.

Jesus was a woman murdered at the *École Polytechnique* on December 6, 1989, so Jack comforted her sisters and helped found the White Ribbon Campaign of men committed to end male violence against women.

Jesus was a man dying of AIDS in Toronto, and Jack spoke out for that man and his community and advocated for AIDS funding in Canada and also in Africa.

Jesus was a lesbian woman who couldn't get an apartment with her partner because of discrimination against them, so Jack advocated for gay rights and gay marriage.

Jesus was a city choking on automobile congestion and confusion, so Jack rode to work and advocated for bike lanes.

Jesus was a single mom working at a minimum wage job and trying to balance whether to pay the rent or buy food for her kids, so Jack advocated for a living wage and deeper social support for the poor.

Jesus was a kid who had got in trouble with the law and found himself in jail, so Jack advocated for better social programs for kids like Jesus so they wouldn't get in trouble and would find their way to be supportive members of the community.

I was hungry and you gave me food.
I was thirsty and you gave me drink.
I was a stranger and you took me in.
I was naked and you clothed me.
I was sick and you visited me.
I was in prison and you came to me.
When, Lord? When were you hungry and I gave you food, thirsty and I gave you drink?
I tell you, whenever you have done this to the least of my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me.

Jack Layton wasn't Jesus, but somehow he recognized Jesus in the lives of the most vulnerable in our society.

And that, I think, is what we are most deeply longing for. To see in the face of our neighbours not only our own reflection looking back at us, so that we will do unto them as we would have them do unto us, but that we would recognize something sacred in these our neighbours, our brothers and sisters. To see in them the face of Jesus.

Jack probably didn't know that all of these people were Jesus. That's okay. Jesus knew.

Rev. Hawkes said to Jack what he was convinced Jack would hear from someone else, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

And I say, Amen. And thank you, Jack.

Brian Walsh is a Christian Reformed Campus minister at the University of Toronto. His most recent book is Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement *(Eerdmans, 2008).*

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Anniversaries

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Obituaries

Jolle "Joe" Devries

of Listowel, has entered into the presence of his Lord and Saviour on Wednesday, August 24, 2011, in his 91st year.

Beloved husband of Jantje "Jean" (Pikstra) Devries for 62 years.

Dear father of Robert Devries (Arthur Potts von der Lippe) of Cambridge, Grace Leipscher (Rainer) of Cambridge, John (in heaven), Emma Devries Voves (Alan) of Toronto, Louise Eitel (Jeff) of Kitchener, Jo-Anne Edlund (Mark) of London, Dorothy Bonvanie (Bill) of Cambridge, Alfred Devries (Joanne) of Gowanstown, Alice Burgsma (Byrne) of Dungannon, Harold Devries (Kimberley) of West Montrose, and Gerald Marc Devries (Natasha) of St. Mary's. Father-in-law of Lynn (nee Gauthier). Also loved by 26 grandchildren and 4 great-grandchildren.

Dear brother of Harm Devries (Roelie d.) of Brampton, Hiltje van Lobenstein (Andre d.) of the Netherlands and Bill Devries (Elly) of Halton Hills. Predeceased by his brother Martin and sisters Klaaske (Jan d.), Iep (Jitse d.), Gees, and Eitje (Wolter d.) of the Netherlands. Dear brother-in-law of Doetje Devries, Fred van Til, Mien Ter Hamsel (Jan d.), Hannie Boonstra (Albert d.), and Roel Siebring in Kelowna, Anke Ytsma (Jetse d.) of Burlington, and Abelien Bron (Henk d.) of the Netherlands.

Jolle and his wife Jantje have been long-time members of the Bethel Christian Reformed Church in Listowel. The funeral service was held at Bethel on Saturday, August 27 with Rev.Ralph Wigboldus officiating. Interment at Fairview Cemetery, Listowel, prior to the service.

If desired, memorial contributions to the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation or Alzheimer's Society would be appreciated and may be arranged through the Eaton Funeral Home, Listowel (519-291- 4840). On-line condolence at www.eatonfuneralhome.ca

Life Stories
Anita Brinkman

Dave Van Kesteren

'Balance' has become an important word – or at least an important concept – in Dave Van Kesteren's life. Many men find it difficult to balance their responsibilities between work and home, but when a man is a husband, father of eight, and grandfather to a growing clan, at home, and a Member of Parliament at work, the balance seems more daunting somehow. Then, there's the challenge of balancing the role of 'government representative' with that of 'man of faith'. Dave admits it took him about two or three years to come to a good balance, and he is still learning.

Balance was something Dave learned quite young, when it comes to politics. Having inherited his interest in politics from his mother and his grandmother, Dave grew up in an environment of political discussion. He was fascinated by how things worked in the political world, and at the possibility of playing a role in leading the country. Yet at the time, there was a view among many Christians that politics is no place for Christians, and the church needs to focus on 'Kingdom work'. To some degree, Dave and his family agreed with this view, often concluding that a Christian couldn't be a politician. His interest, however, was impossible to deny, and he continued to follow politics. "But," he says, "my life took a different direction. I married young, had a large family…it seemed that dream wouldn't be realized. And that was okay." Together he and his wife, Faye, raised their eight children and Dave started and ran a successful business… and life went on.

Meanwhile, Dave passed his love of politics on to his children, and some of them began to get involved. Christian views on politics were starting to change, opportunities were being recognized, and more Christians were starting to enter the world of politics. Dave's interest continued – and then one day he came to an unexpected decision point. His oldest daughter, Rachel, had become involved with the Alliance party. In 2003, she and Dave were discussing the Reform-Alliance merger while they worked together at the family business. Dave says, "I flippantly joked with Rachel, 'What d'you think – should I take a shot at this?'" Rachel took his off-the-cuff remark seriously, and suddenly he was faced with a real decision. It was a difficult decision in terms of timing, and there were many things Dave had to consider, but whether or not Christians 'belong' in politics was no longer an issue. "I'm a Calvinist," he says. "I believe our faith naturally affects all areas of life. I'm wired for politics; and, by the grace of God, I'm in the family of God. It's not 'I'm a Christian, so I've got to change the world'. God is in control. What we do in life is just a natural outworking of our faith."

When he told the rest of the family about the possibility, Faye initially said nothing. Dave gave his wife the time she needed to 'mull over' the decision which had the potential to bring such enormous changes to their lives, and made it clear that he would give up the idea if she asked him to. She supported him in his political aspirations, and told him, "This is something you have to do."

In the 2004 election, Dave, the Conservative nominee of just four months, ran against the 17-year incumbent MP. He lost by 408 votes. "That was probably one of the toughest things I went through. I didn't want to keep going…. Of course people told me it wasn't me they were rejecting…that's just politics. And I knew that…but it's still hard. You pour yourself into it – and you can come up with nothing." One encouragement in this difficult time was from a friend in politics who told him, "408 votes is not 'No', but 'Not yet.'"

In January of 2006, his chance came again: another election, another campaign. On January 23, 2006, Dave was elected as the Conservative MP for Chatham-Kent-Essex. He smiles as he recalls, "There's an old Robert Redford movie, 'The Candidate'… the last line, when he's elected, is, 'Now what do we do?' I had that feeling." One of his supporters had experience in politics, and became his chief of staff. They hired staff in Ottawa and in two constituency offices and brought his offices 'up to speed'. "We were up and running in a month," Dave says. "Thus began my career as a politician. It was a huge learning curve."

Dave was one of 40 new MPs on the Hill in Ottawa at that time. "It was a very interesting time in 2006…. It was a collection of common people, from all walks of life, converged on the Hill. It was a close-knit bunch…extremely disciplined." He formed strong friendships with other members of parliament, many of whom are people of faith, and still marvels at how well they work together as a team. The group of 'newbies' has become very close, having learned together and gained support from each other. Dave also sought out more experienced MPs and learned from them.

"One of the toughest things," admits Dave, "is the fact that you're always 'on stage'. You always have to remember you're the MP." He balances this aspect of his career by reserving weekends – particularly Sundays – for his family. "That time forces me back to reality... 'I happen to have some influence in a larger sphere, but this is what it's really all about.'" Dave also recognizes the limits of political power. "God is in control," he says with confidence. "I pray for guidance, ... that God would endow me with wisdom...and equip me for what I do. But ultimately God is in control."

Dave balances his time now between Ottawa and his riding: working on committees, participating in question period, and attending meetings in the capital, and meeting with constituents, attending functions, and enjoying his family in his riding. He enjoys his work more and more, and is looking forward to resuming his work in Ottawa once the House is in session again. "The outcome of the May 2 election will be discussed for years – nobody expected that outcome," reflects Dave. "It'll be a different kind of energy."

Anita Brinkman is a part-time tutor and freelance writer from Chatham, Ontario. With this series, she hopes to demonstrate that every life has stories worth preserving and sharing.

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Events/Advertising

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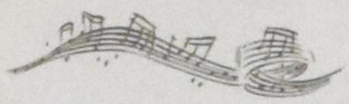

Sep 24 'Refresh and Renew' worship conference. Redeemer University College, **Ancaster.** See **redeemer.ca/worship** or email worship@redeemer.ca

Sep 25 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching. DVDs are available.

Oct 1 Netherlands Bazaar, Thornhill Community Centre, For information on the Bazaar, please contact 905-477-1243 web: **netherlandsbazaar.com**

Oct 15 Day of Encouragement. Hamilton District Christian High School, **Ancaster** For information, call: 905-336-0967 ext. 278 Information will soon be on our website: **diaconalministries.com**

DMC

Nov 4 Christian Festival Concert. 7:30 pm. Roy Thomson Hall, **Toronto**, See ad.

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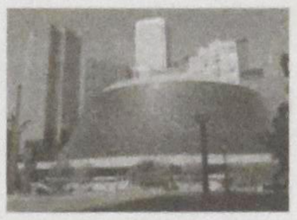

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The rise of the European right

Walter Miedema

OSLO, Norway – On July 22, 2011 Anders Behring Breivik set off a car bomb outside the government offices in Oslo, killing eight people and wounding 11. One and a half hours and 40 kilometers later, Breivik arrived at a youth camp on the island of Utoya and opened fire, killing 69 and wounding many others. After he was done shooting, Breivik himself called the police and surrendered shortly before they arrived on the island. When Breivik was brought back to Utoya on August 14 to reenact his actions as part of the police investigation, the killer repeatedly stated that his actions were necessary.

Breivik has made it very clear that his actions were politically motivated, and that his targets were chosen specifically for their political impact. Breivik targeted the government offices because he felt that the party in charge had allowed too much immigration and permitted too much multiculturalism. The youth camp was targeted for similar reasons. The camp was organized by the youth wing of the ruling Labour party, and Breivik saw it as a method of brainwashing the youth of the country into becoming too accepting of multiculturalism and immigration.

Breivik's actions have obviously caused his sanity to be called into question. The intensity of his opinions and the acts he felt were necessary are, thankfully, unique. Breivik is, however, not alone in his resistance to multiculturalism and immigration, especially when it comes to people from Islamic and Middle-Eastern nations. Right wing political parties have been gaining support in many Western European countries. While these parties have been quick to distance themselves from Breivik's statements and actions, the existence of a venomous domestic terrorist in a peaceful country such as Norway suggests that North America does not hold a monopoly on political polarization between the right and left.

Gaining support

Norway's Scandinavian neighbours have far right presences in their political landscapes. In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats, who ran on a platform of cutting immigration by 90 percent, have almost six percent of the seats in the national assembly. The party also thinks the government should support immigrants who want to return to their homeland. Some party members have even worn Nazi uniforms to party meetings.

One country east in Finland, the True Finn party took the third largest block of seats in the national legislature with 19 percent of the vote. This party blames immigration for the erosion of traditional Finnish values, which the party holds to be mainly characterized by Christian values. Likewise, the People's Party in Denmark holds almost 14 percent of the national parliament. It has forced the government to implement strict border controls, and despite the secular attitude in Denmark, claims that Christianity is an essential part of Danish life.

Outside Scandinavia, nearby Amsterdam is one of the most multicultural cities in the world, where the Netherlands' Freedom Party has become the third largest in parliament. The party's leader, Geert Wilders, has openly stated "I don't hate Muslims, I hate Islam," and was charged with, but acquitted of, inciting hatred against Muslims. The party's platform includes banning the Quran and mosque building. Breivik himself stated that Wilders's Freedom Party is the only "true" conservative party in Europe.

Right wing politicians like Geert Wilders influenced the Norway killer.

Eurabia

The policies of these various parties are symptomatic of the perception of many Europeans that Europe is becoming an Islamic continent, a belief that has informally been given the name Eurabia. A number of events such as the inclusion of Turkey in the European Union have given rise to the fear that Islamic influence could overwhelm perceived European values. In 2006 Libyan strongman Muammar-al-Gaddafi predicted that Europe would become a Muslim continent in "a few decades." More recently Geert Wilders cited Gaddafi's speech when addressing the British parliament, claiming it to be the one time that Gaddafi was right. Breivik is fully aware of the Eurabia theory and included a lengthy discussion of it in his internet manifesto, *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*.

Experts who have been watching the trends of Islamic presence in Europe see the potential for right wing parties to increase in support and for more centrist governments to further define their platforms and official policies in relation to domestic Muslim populations. The potential shape that these policies could take is frightening. While Breivik's attack should prompt Europeans to consider the shared humanity of all people, it may in some ways end up solidifying or even deepening political divisions.

Many see Breivik's crime as proof of the dangers of right-wing populist rhetoric. Here, protesters carry a sign reading: "In memory of the victims of the attack – stop the right-wing populists." No direct connection between Breivik and right-wing populist groups has been found. ***(spiegel.de)***

Walter Miedema lives and writes in Vancouver.

Odds and Trends

Asking for it

Got a parenting problem? There's a didactic picture book to solve it. From *Hazel Needs Glasses* to *Allie the Allergic Elephant*, publishing companies target anxious parents by offering illustrated explanations for life's little trials. Whether your eight-year-old wets the bed or faces divorce, there's a book giving advice on the subject. But just as with adult self-help books, not all advice is created equal. And kids aren't able to judge between the reasonable, biblical or otherwise appropriate.

Maggie Goes on a Diet comes out in October, aimed at kids four to eight. According to the book's back cover, Maggie's diet "transforms" her from overweight and insecure to the school's soccer star. But children can "stunt their growth and height" by cutting calories, says a nutritionist at the University of California-Berkley. And pre-teens are the prime age for developing anorexia, which books like this unintentionally promote. Every *Barbie* and Disney princess picture book carries a similar message, although not as explicitly. Six-year-olds don't need another manual for how to hate your body.

A daily 9/11

"What happened after September 11th broke my heart. Conservative Christians rallied around the drums of war. Liberal Christians took to the streets. The cross was smothered by the flag and trampled under the feet of angry protesters. The church community was lost, so the many hungry seekers found community in the civic religion of American patriotism. [. . .] The tragedy of the church's reaction to September 11th is not that we rallied around the families in New York and D.C. but that our love simply reflected the borders and allegiances of the world. [. . .] There is no doubt that we must mourn those lives on September 11th. We must mourn the lives of the soldiers. But with the same passion and outrage, we must mourn the lives of every Iraqi who is lost. They are just as precious, no more, no less. In our rebirth, every life lost in Iraq is just as tragic as a life lost in New York or D.C. And the lives of the 30,000 children who die of starvation each day is like six September 11ths every single day, a silent tsunami that happens every week."

– Shane Claiborne, *The Irresistible Revolution.*

Absurd arrests

Syria and Libya may be getting the most revolution publicity, but the Belarus government is facing the anger of its citizens too, although expressed in an unusual way – by clapping. Since Alexander Lukashenko, "Europe's last dictator," has banned signs and slogans, the weekly flash mob protestors merely clap their hands to signify their anger at a collapsing economy. Life is grim in the post-Soviet country because hundreds of thousands of Belarusians are out of work and the *ruble* was recently devalued by more than 60 percent.

Bizarrely, a one-armed man was among those arrested for expressing a political opinion by clapping. When Konstantin Kaplin, officially registered as a disabled person for having only one arm, was convicted for clapping, he says even the judge looked embarrassed. Nonetheless, Kaplin has to pay a fine of $200 (U.S.), the equivalent of more than twice his monthly pension. In an equally absurd trial, a deaf and mute person has been accused of shouting anti-government slogans.

"Strange things are happening here in Belarus," a Minsk newspaper editor says. "Lukashenko finds himself in a blind alley, and he's fantasizing about how to get rid of all the people who disagree with him." He might as well try to figure out how much noise can be made by one hand clapping.

–Angela Reitsma Bick